Grace Harlowe's Return to Overton Campus

The College Girls Series

Jessie Graham Flower, A.M.

Doris Gifford

The Girls Worked Busily.

Frontispiece.

Grace Harlowe's Return to Overton Campus

By

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PHILADELPHIA

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CHAPTER I

A MIDSUMMER PILGRIMAGE

"OVERTON, at last!" exclaimed Grace Harlowe, as, regardless of possible cinders and stern railroad injunctions, she leaned far out of the car window to obtain a first eager glimpse of her destination.

It was midsummer, and the quiet, little town of Overton drowsed gently, not to awaken until the sounds of girl laughter and the passing of light feet through its sleepy streets roused it to the realization that it was Overton College that made its hum-drum existence worth while.

"Oh, Mrs. Gray, you can't imagine how happy I feel!" went on Grace, her eyes eloquent with emotion. "Next to home, I love Overton better than any other place on earth. I'm so glad we are going to stay at Wayne Hall, and that Mrs. Elwood is to meet us."

A long shrill whistle, a creaking and groan-

ing of protesting iron wheels, the stentorian cry of "Overton! Overton!" and then a sudden jarring stop. Grace reached to the rack overhead for Mrs. Gray's small leather bag, allowing the dainty little old lady to precede her down the aisle which was practically clear. Apparently they were the only Overton passengers in that car. She stood still on the top step of the train until Mrs. Gray had been safely landed on the platform by the smiling porter, then, disdaining his helping hand, ran down the steps with a joyful skip that caused her companion to say indulgently, "You'll never grow up, Grace, and I'm glad of it. I can't become reconciled to the fact that Nora and Jessica are brides-to-be and that Anne's art is making her terribly serious. It's a joy to my old age to see you frisk about as happily as you did when you were a little thing in short white skirts with two long braids of fair hair hanging down your back.

"I don't really feel a bit older than I did then," confessed Grace. "Sometimes I'm almost ashamed of my enthusiasm. It seems as though nice things are always happening to me, and this summer pilgrimage of just we two is the nicest of all."

They were walking slowly across the deserted platform now, and Grace was keeping

a sharp look-out on all sides for the short, comfortable figure of Mrs. Elwood.

"There she is!" Grace hurried forward, her hands outstretched. The next instant they were held in Mrs. Elwood's welcoming grasp, while she kissed Grace's soft cheek.

"My dear, dear girl!" she exclaimed, a suspicious moisture in her kindly blue eyes. "It does seem good to see you again. I'm very glad to welcome you to Overton, Mrs. Gray," she turned to shake hands with the donor of Harlowe House, "and delighted to know that you are going to stay with me instead of going to the Tourraine. Miss Harlowe's old room is ready for her, and I'm going to put you in the room Miss Nesbit and Miss Briggs used to have."

"You'll be haunted by the kimono-clad shades of Miriam and Elfreda drinking tea and eating cakes at unseemly hours of the night," laughed Grace.

"How are all my girls?" asked Mrs. Elwood. "I don't know what I shall do without them this year. You will have to come and see me often and tell me all about them, Miss Harlowe. Now let me see. There ought to be a taxicab just the other side of the station. Yes, there it is."

The driver touched his cap smilingly to

Grace as they climbed into the automobile. "It does look good to see you here again, miss," he said respectfully.

"Thank you. I'm glad to see you again." Grace beamed whole-heartedly upon him. How many times he had carried her to and from the station. It was he who had driven the car on that memorable day when Ruth Denton had gone to the station to meet her father. Grace's eyes grew dreamy as they passed through the familiar streets. How much had happened since the time when she had entered Oakdale High School as a freshman with college in the far and hidden future.

To her many friends "GRACE HARLOWE'S PLEBE YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL," "GRACE HARLOWE'S SOPHOMORE YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL," "GRACE HARLOWE'S JUNIOR YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL," and "GRACE HARLOWE'S SENIOR YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL" are now familiar records. Equally well known to these friends is the story of her freshman year at Overton, as set forth in "GRACE HARLOWE'S FIRST YEAR AT OVERTON COLLEGE."

Accompanied by her friends, Miriam Nesbit and Anne Pierson, Grace began her freshman year at Overton College under a cloud which rose from her ready defense of J. Elfreda Briggs, a disgruntled student who had made

enemies of two sophomores, and whose first days at college were made very unpleasant by them. J. Elfreda's subsequent casting aside of her friendship and her tardy realization of Grace's worth brought about a happy ending of their freshman year.

In "Grace Harlowe's Second Year at Overton College" the four girls set out to find the rainbow side of their sophomore year. How each girl found it, but in an entirely different manner, how Grace lived up to her resolve to choose only the highest in college, and how the famous Semper Fidelis Club came into existence, made the sophomore year in college memorable.

"Grace Harlowe's Third Year at Overton College" told of what befell the four friends as juniors. The advent of Kathleen West, a newspaper girl, into college was the first link in a chain of petty difficulties with which Grace was obliged to contend as a junior. The carnival given by the Semper Fidelis Club in which the Alice in Wonderland Circus was enacted, the important part which Jean, the old hunter of Oakdale fame, played in one Overton girl's life, the message Emma Dean forgot to deliver, and countless other absorbing incidents served to fill their junior year with ceaseless interest.

"Grace Harlowe's Fourth Year at Overton College" found Grace and her friends on the homeward stretch with commencement at the end of their college trail. The record of Grace's senior year was filled with happenings grave and gay. It ended in a blaze of honor and glory, and it was on Commencement day that she made her decision to return to Overton and look after Harlowe House, lately completed and endowed by Mrs. Gray in honor of her young friends and dedicated to the use of poor girls who were making valiant efforts to obtain an education.

It was in reference to Harlowe House, her future home, that Grace and Mrs. Gray had made this midsummer pilgrimage, as Grace had laughingly styled it, to Overton. As their car glided through the shady streets of the dignified college town Grace wondered if it were really eight years since her freshman days in Oakdale High School. It certainly couldn't be four years since Mabel Ashe had conducted her and Anne and Miriam to the Tourraine on that first eventful afternoon. She remembered just how beautiful Mabel had looked in her white linen frock, with her white embroidered parasol tilted over one shoulder, an effective frame for her lovely face and wavy, golden-brown hair.

"Dreaming, Grace?" Mrs. Gray's voice dispelled the vision. "I can't blame you. I suppose this ride brings up hosts of memories."

Grace nodded. She could not trust her voice to answer. A sudden mist filled her eyes, a silent tribute to those whose feet had once kept pace with hers through these beloved ways. Commencement had scattered them broadcast. She, alone, was coming back again to take up life at the college. How she would miss them all. The dry irresistible humor of Emma Dean, the sturdy independence of J. Elfreda Briggs, the daintiness of Arline Thayer and the steadfast loyalty of Ruth Denton. Last of all there were Anne and Miriam. Anne, her devoted little comrade of years, and Miriam, whose faith and good fellowship had never failed her.

A sob rose in Grace's throat, but she quickly stifled it. After all she was about to begin the work she herself had chosen. She had known when she announced her determination to take charge of Harlowe House that things could never be quite the same. It would be selfish, indeed, in her to break down and cry when Mrs. Gray had come to Overton solely to help her select the furniture and plan for the opening of Harlowe House in September.

Grace pulled herself together and, resolutely putting her own sense of loss behind her, said steadily: "I couldn't help thinking of the girls for a minute. It made me want to cry, but I've set my face to the future now, and I'm sure that my new work is going to bring me as much happiness here as I had during the other dear four years. When I think of how splendid it was in you to give Harlowe House to Overton, I feel as though there isn't any sacrifice too great for me to make to insure its success, and I hope that my coming back to Overton Campus to do my work is going to mean a thousand times more to me next June than it does now."

CHAPTER II

A WELCOME GUEST

THE summer sun, streaming intimately in at the window of her room, and touching her hair with warm, awakening fingers, caused Grace to open her eyes before six o'clock the next morning. She lay looking about her, unable for the moment to remember where she was. Then she laughed and reaching for her kimono, which hung folded across

the footboard of the bed, slipped it on, and, thrusting her feet into her bedroom slippers, went to the window.

"Dear old Overton Hall," she murmured, her eyes fixed lovingly on the stately gray tower of the building that she had come to regard as a close friend. Again she found herself overwhelmed by a tide of reminiscences. How many times she and Anne had stood at the self-same window, arm in arm, gazing out at the self-same sights. She could see the very seat at the foot of the big tree where she had sat the day Emma Dean had poked her head about the big syringa bush and mournfully handed her the letter from Ruth Denton's father which had been buried in the pocket of Emma's coat for so many weeks. She smiled as she recalled the ludicrously penitent expression with which Emma had delivered the letter. There were the library steps on which Arline Thayer had sat and cried so disconsolately because she could not go home for Christmas. Once more she saw a strange procession winding its way across the campus headed by a walking, chattering scarecrow, Emma Dean again in her famous representation of "Never Too Late to Mend," which had been one of the great features of the Famous Fiction dance.

Then she saw four girls, with their shining

heads bared to the sun, strolling across the campus, talking earnestly of what the future held for them. And still again she saw them in caps and gowns marching toward the Gate of Commencement. It was only a little time since they had passed through that gateway, yet how long it seemed.

Suddenly her look of abstraction changed to one of startled interest. Running to the door she threw it open and listened intently. She heard Mrs. Elwood's voice raised in pleased surprise, then, could she believe her ears? she heard another never-to-be-forgotten voice say, "I could see that there was some one awake and stirring."

With a joyous cry of "J. Elfreda, where, oh, where did you come from?" a lithe, blue-robed figure raced down the stairs and wrapped both arms tightly about a plump young woman, in a tailored coat suit, who returned the warm embrace with interest.

"Oh, Grace, I can't tell you how glad I am to see you again!" exclaimed J. Elfreda Briggs fervently. "I never was so glad in all my life as when I found out you were here. The letter was forwarded to me at the beach. We're at Wildwood for the summer. Maybe I didn't pick up my things in a hurry. To use slang, which you know I can't resist using oc-

casionally, I hot-footed it for the station the minute Ma said I could come."

"Which letter do you mean, Elfreda?" asked Grace in a puzzled tone.

"Why the one from Mrs. Gray, of course," returned Elfreda. "Isn't she here?"

"Yes, but——"

"Grace! Elfreda!" called Mrs. Gray from the head of the stairs, "come up here, children."

"Come on." Grace seized Elfreda's heavy suit case and started up the stairs. Elfreda followed with alacrity.

"Now," laughed Grace, as she stepped into Mrs. Gray's room, "I demand an explanation." She laid her hands lightly upon the old lady's shoulders, smiling down at her, then bent and kissed her cheek.

"This is certainly a happy meeting," declared Elfreda, as she embraced Mrs. Gray, who rose to greet her.

"I'm so glad you could come, my dear. I knew that Grace would miss her friends dreadfully when she came back here. Anne and Miriam are both away, and Nora and Jessica are too deep in the mysteries of hope chests and wedding finery to be dragged off on even the most delightful of midsummer pilgrimages. But my greatest reason for asking you to come

was because I believed you were the very person Grace needed to make her happy here. You see it will take at least two weeks to set things to rights and she must have inspiring company. I hope everything has arrived safely. Suppose we hurry through with our breakfast and go over to Harlowe House at once. Mrs. Elwood tells me that she informed the caretaker yesterday of our coming. We shall be obliged to stop at his house for the key."

"Oh, Elfreda, I'm so sorry that you weren't with us in New York," was Grace's regretful cry. "We stayed with the Southards, Mrs. Gray, Anne, Miriam and I. Anne, Miss Southard and Mr. Southard left New York City for California last week. Mr. Southard and Anne are to appear as joint stars in film productions of 'As You Like It,' 'Hamlet,' 'King Lear' and possibly other Shakespearian plays. It is their first experience in posing before the camera. Anne sent you her love. She will write you as soon as she is settled."

"Dear little Anne," smiled Elfreda, her eyes growing tender.

"I hope she'll be back in time for the girls' weddings. Nora and Jessica say positively that they won't be married without her." Grace looked anxious.

"When are they to be married?"

"The last of September. The date hasn't been set."

"Grace," Elfreda fixed round solemn eyes on her friend, "do you feel very old this summer?"

"Not the least little bit. I can't realize that I've come back to Harlowe House to take charge of it. I feel as young as I felt when I first entered high school."

"Well, I'm glad to hear it, for, to save me, I can't feel responsible and dignified. I've run and raced and swum and played golf like an Indian all summer, and honestly I feel ever so much younger than when I came to Overton four years ago. See how tanned I am? I haven't gained an ounce either. I weigh just one hundred and thirty-five pounds and no more," concluded J. Elfreda in triumph.

"You are in splendid condition, Elfreda," praised Mrs. Gray. Grace nodded emphatic approval.

"Yes, I'm strong enough to hustle furniture, beat rugs, scrub floors, or do anything else necessary to the beautifying and eternal improvement of Harlowe House." Then she added slyly, "Lead me to it."

"You'll be led to it fast enough," promised Grace. "Just wait until we have some breakfast."

At that moment Mrs. Elwood appeared in the open doorway. "Shall I bring your breakfast upstairs this morning?" she asked. "I thought Mrs. Gray might like to have it in her room."

"Thank you, but I'd rather go downstairs this morning," nodded the energetic old lady. "May we breakfast a la negligee?"

"Yes, come down just as you are. There is no one here besides myself and the maid."

"Miss Briggs have you had your breakfast? Jane is making waffles. I thought you——"

"Waffles!" exclaimed Elfreda, rolling her eyes in ecstacy. "If I'd had fifty breakfasts I couldn't resist waffles. Thank goodness Vinton's wasn't open."

"Aren't waffles supposed to be fattening?" inquired Grace judiciously.

"Don't ask me," was Elfreda's fervent protest. "I've set my mind on eating them, even though I have to walk to Hunter's Rock and back in the glare of the noonday sun to counteract their deadly effects."

It was a merry trio that gathered around the table which Mrs. Elwood had set on the roomy, vine-covered back porch, and it was fully an hour after they sat down to breakfast before they rose to go upstairs and make ready for their visit to Harlowe House.

"There is no use in trying to begin our real work to-day," declared Grace, as the three left Mrs. Elwood's and strolled slowly along College Street in the direction of the caretaker's house. Mr. Symes, who had faithfully executed so many commissions for Grace, had been selected as the best possible person to look after the house. "Mr. Symes was to see that everything was unpacked before we arrived. We shall have to employ two men to move the heavy furniture. Thank goodness and Mrs. Gray, there are no carpets to be laid. The floors are all hard wood and there are rugs for every room except the kitchen and laundry."

"I brought an old dress along," Elfreda informed her friends. "I helped Ma set our cottage to rights this summer and I know something about work. We had two maids and a scrubwoman. The maids were in my way, so I sent them off for a holiday and the scrubwoman and I tackled the job and went through with it like wildfire. Ma nearly had a spasm, but she liked the looks of things when we had finished. You should have seen me, though. Ma didn't like my looks. I guess I did resemble a human mop if you know what that looks like."

"I can imagine," laughed Grace. "If you attack the business of putting Harlowe House

to rights with the same energy, I shall know exactly how you looked when you cleaned the cottage."

"Perhaps you will," Elfreda grinned boyishly. "I hadn't thought of that."

"You couldn't see that far ahead, could you?" quizzed Grace with twinkling eyes.

"No I couldn't," declared Elfreda earnestly, then, catching sight of Grace's dancing eyes, she laughed good-naturedly. "You will tease me about that. I can see that you'll never outgrow the habit."

"I can see that Elfreda is going to lighten our labors and make our tasks merry," smiled Mrs. Gray. "What a joy and a diversion you must have been to Miriam."

"I was anything but an unqualified source of pleasure during my freshman year," replied Elfreda. "It is plain to be seen that Grace never told you my early Overton history."

"Now, Elfreda——" began Grace, but Elfreda was not to be thus easily deterred from saying her say. She launched forth with a ludicrous account of her freshman shortcomings that left Mrs. Gray and Grace breathless with laughter.

"Elfreda, it is hard to say which is funnier, you or Hippy," Mrs. Gray's eyes twinkled with enjoyment.

"Well, isn't it so?" demanded J. Elfreda. "Isn't that exactly the way I used to do?"

"It's what I call a highly exaggerated account of your self-named misdeeds," returned Grace. "You haven't said a word about all the nice things you did for the girls."

"I don't remember them," evaded Elfreda hastily. "Oh, there's Mr. Symes now! How are you, Mr. Symes? You didn't expect to see me here, did you?"

"Well, well, if it ain't Miss Briggs," beamed the old man joyfully. His remembrance of J. Elfreda was decidedly pleasant. She had always paid him generously for the numerous errands he had run for her. He greeted Grace with equal enthusiasm, and bobbed like a nodding mandarin before Mrs. Gray.

"I hope you have been well, Mr. Symes. How is your wife and how do you like being caretaker of Harlowe House?" asked Grace.

"I'm well, miss, and so's my wife. It's a fine place, miss, that Harlowe House, an' it'll be finer still when fall comes and it's full of Overton students. We're pretty proud of our young ladies, we Overton folks. Excuse me, miss, I'll go over to my house and get the key. I'll be right along.

"He has a whole lot of real college spirit,"

commented Elfreda, "or he couldn't speak so beautifully of the Overton girls."

"He always was a perfect old dear," agreed Grace warmly.

The caretaker soon overtook them with the key, and the little company crossed the street and traversed the deserted campus.

"How strangely still everything is," commented Grace. "Not in the least like it was six months ago, is it, Elfreda?"

"It gives me the blues," averred Elfreda in a low tone.

"Here we are," called Mrs. Gray, with a cheery attempt at dispelling the tiny cloud of dejection that had fallen over the two girls. "Harlowe House couldn't have a prettier site."

The three women followed Mr. Symes up the steps, then, as if by common consent, turned and looked out over the green expanse of closely-clipped lawn, sprinkled with sentinel-like old trees. They had stood guard year after year and silently watched the comings and goings of the hundreds of girls who proudly acknowledged Overton as their Alma Mater.

"What's the use of gazing and mooning?" asked Elfreda, with sudden brusqueness. "Please open that door, Mr. Symes. I shall certainly weep and wail disconsolately out of

pure sentiment if you don't distract my attention with something else. Show me the furniture, or the boxes it came in, or anything else that won't call forth tender reminiscences."

Grace's laugh sounded a trifle shaky, but it was a laugh nevertheless. Something in Elfreda's brusque tones acted as an antidote to her retrospection. She had been more or less ghost-ridden ever since her return to Overton. She now resolved to shake off that pleasantly-melancholy sensation and "be up and doing with a heart for any fate."

The caretaker admitted them to a hall crowded with huge packing boxes. In fact, the whole of the first floor was occupied by the large shipments of furniture recently delivered into the care of Mr. Symes.

"It's worse than the cottage," announced Elfreda; "a regular howling wilderness. I'd like to know how we can possibly guess what's what and why. These boxes all look alike. If we have our minds set upon seeing the parlor suite, we'll be sure to unpack the kitchen furniture instead."

"We'll let the men wrestle with the unpacking, girls," decided Mrs. Gray. "I don't wish my body guard to nurse wholesale bruises and smashed fingers. Mr. Symes, can you have two

men besides yourself here this afternoon to unpack these things?"

"I certainly can, Mrs. Gray," promised Mr. Symes with respectful promptness.

"Then we'll have to possess our souls in patience until to-morrow," sighed Grace. "Isn't this a lovely, roomy house, Elfreda? I'm so glad, too, that there isn't a prim, stiff parlor. I like this immense living-room much better. The girls will surely like it. It will serve as a library too. That little room just off the hall will make such a convenient office for me. Imagine me as the head of a college house, with an office all my own, Elfreda."

"It's a good thing for the house," commented Elfreda. "I hope the girls that live here will appreciate you, Grace. I hope none of them will be as silly as J. Elfreda Briggs was."

"Elfreda, how can you?" remonstrated Grace.

"How could I, you mean," flung back Elfreda. "Because I was a spoiled, selfish ingrate who never stopped to think of any one else's rights."

"Now, now, Elfreda," protested Mrs. Gray.

"Well, I was," insisted Elfreda positively. "It took a whole year to reduce me to order. I wasn't as hopeless as some of the others. It took three years to make Alberta Wicks and

Mary Hampton real Overton girls, and two years to instil college spirit into Kathleen West. But Grace never gave any of us up, even though we treated her so shabbily. That's why I just said I hoped that the girls would appreciate Grace. I'd hate to think that some stupid ill-natured freshman, it's more likely to be a freshman than any one else, would behave like an idiot and spoil her first year at Harlowe House." There was an expression of anxious concern on Elfreda's round face.

"Don't worry, Elfreda," reassured Grace, "the students who come to Harlowe House to live are sure to be nice. Girls who have their own way to pay through college are usually cheerful and unselfish. They are anxious to live and willing to let live."

"I don't know about that. Kathleen West wasn't a glaring pattern of amiability when she entered Overton," reminded Elfreda. "Of course she's now a brilliant example of what forbearance will accomplish, and you know that I am very fond of her, but you and I remember what we went through during the forbearing process."

"Don't croak, J. Elfreda Briggs," admonished Grace lightly, "I don't imagine that everything will be plain sailing this year. That would be asking too much. Still I hope I shall

not have any serious misunderstandings with my girls. I'm going to remember my motto, 'Blessed are they that have found their work,' and not shirk anything that comes within the line of it."

"I guess there isn't the slightest danger of shirking on your part," was Elfreda's dry retort. "I hope the men that do the unpacking of this stuff will be imbued with the same spirit. You'd better bring out that motto and hang it up where they can see it. To change the subject, we haven't been upstairs yet."

"Come on, then."

"I think I'll wait for you on the veranda, children," said Mrs. Gray. "Don't stay upstairs too long. I should like to go back to Mrs. Elwood's, telephone for a taxicab, and make a call upon Dr. Morton this morning."

"We'll hurry," promised Grace, as they ascended the open staircase which led to the second floor. "These are to be my quarters," she announced, opening a door at the end of the hall on the left side of the stairs. "This left wing was designed especially for me. The right wing has the same amount of space, but it is divided into two bedrooms. But the left has a sitting-room and bedroom, with a bathroom between the two. It seems selfish in me to have so much room,

but Mrs. Gray insists that I need it and wishes me to be thoroughly comfortable. She wanted me to have circassian walnut bedroom furniture, but I chose oak. I don't wish my rooms to suggest luxury. It wouldn't seem in touch with the spirit of my undertaking."

Elfreda regarded Grace with loving admiration. "You're the squarest, fairest girl I ever knew or even expect to know, Grace," was her tribute. "And you deserve the best that the Harlowe House girls can give you."

CHAPTER III

AN UNEXPECTED CALLER

"'AND if I do say it as shouldn't,' this room is a credit to our college and our own sweet native land," proclaimed Elfreda, as she viewed with critical eyes the long cheerful living-room, to which she and Grace had just put the final touches. The morning sunshine of a perfect midsummer day poured in at the windows flooding the scene with dazzling light, as though smiling its approval of the pretty room. The walls and ceilings were papered in cream color with a running border of green leaves. The floor rug was in

two shades of green, and the window draperies were in green and white. The furniture was in mission oak, but there were several comfortable arm chairs and willow rockers scattered about the room. A long library table took up considerable space at one end of the room, and conveniently near it were rows of book shelves, lined with special books required by the Overton curriculum of study, which, in price, were out of reach of the more impecunious students, and were in such constant demand at the library that their temporary possession often meant weeks of waiting.

There was a piano, of course, but the crowning feature of the room, however, was the wide window seat built across the bow-window at its upper end. It was at least four feet wide, upholstered in thick green velvet and piled high with sofa pillows. It was indeed a cozy corner which invited rest, and Elfreda confidently predicted that it would be the most popular spot in the house.

The house itself had not followed the usual plan of modern architecture. In fact, it was distinctly old-fashioned and built for room rather than effect. The hall ran the length of the house to the kitchen, dividing it into two parts. The dining-room was on the side opposite the living-room, and had also a bow-win-

dow. Directly behind it lay the servants' quarters. Adjoining the living-room was Grace's little office and behind that was a room furnished with every convenience for the benefit of those girls who were obliged to launder their own clothing to save expense.

The second, third and fourth floors were, with the exception of Grace's suite, given up entirely to bedrooms, of which there were sixteen. This meant the accommodation of thirty-two students for whom the perplexing problem of food and shelter was solved for their entire four years' course at Overton, provided they complied with the rules of Harlowe House.

"Doesn't it seem wonderful, Elfreda, that through Mrs. Gray's generosity the girls who come here will be free from the dreadful worry of paying board? All they will have to look out for is their regular college fees, and if they happen to be lucky enough to enter Overton on scholarships they will have absolutely plain sailing." Grace's face was alight with appreciation of Mrs. Gray's gift.

"What a pity Ruth Denton couldn't have had such a chance," mused Elfreda. "Poor little Ruth, how hard she worked."

"And now she has everything," returned Grace. "It seems miraculous that she found her father, doesn't it?"

Elfreda nodded. "Arline Thayer was good to her those first three years. Do you remember the ridiculous quarrel they had because Ruth wouldn't tell us what she was like when she was a little girl?"

"I ought to remember it, considering the fact that I officiated as peace maker," smiled Grace. "How I shall miss Arline. There is only one other girl, outside of you and Miriam and Anne, whom I shall miss as much."

"Emma Dean?" guessed Elfreda.

"Yes, Emma Dean. I can't begin to tell you how fond of her I am and always have been. She was the life of Wayne Hall. Mrs. Elwood was sighing fond remembrance of her only this morning. Really, Elfreda, I wonder if, ever again, there will be a class quite like 19——?"

"Never," declared Elfreda with quick loyalty, then, glancing up at the mission clock on the wall, she exclaimed: "I wonder why Mrs. Gray doesn't come! Let's go out on the veranda and watch for her."

The two young women strolled out onto the veranda just in time to see an automobile drive up to the house containing two persons. One of them was Mrs. Gray, the other, to whom she was talking animatedly, was a broad-shouldered young man, whose gray eyes shone with pleasure as he caught sight of Grace.

"Why, Tom!" she called in astonishment. "Where did you come from? I thought you were away up in Maine." She hurried down the steps, her hands extended.

The young man caught them in his and held them fast. "So I was," he answered, his eyes searching hers, "but my work there is done for the present. I am on my way to Washington, but its a roundabout way, for, when I received your letter, I was devoured with curiosity to see Harlowe House, so I took a day off, on my own responsibility, and came this way."

Grace colored under the young man's ardent gaze. She knew only too well that it was not alone curiosity to see Harlowe House that had taken Tom out of his way. "I'm sorry your curiosity didn't devour you sooner," she retorted mischievously. "If only you had come here last week! You could have made yourself invaluable. However, you are in time to meet Elfreda, at least."

"Yes, Tom," declared his aunt, "you can't afford to miss knowing Elfreda. "She is the counterpart of Hippy, and has kept Grace and I in a perpetual state of smiles during the past two weeks."

Tom helped his aunt out of the automobile and the three walked slowly toward the veranda where Elfreda stood waiting. A mo-

ment later she and Tom were shaking hands and declaring that, having heard so much of each other from Grace, they were really old acquaintances.

"When are you going home?" Tom asked, as half an hour later, the party paused in the living-room after a tour of inspection which included the four floors.

"That is the main subject under discussion at present," smiled Grace. "It must be very soon. If not to-morrow, then the day after. Here we are fairly into August and I have spent a very short time with Father and Mother. Then, too, the Phi Sigma Tau has a great many mysterious rites to observe before two of its members enter into that state known as matrimony. Also we expect Eleanor Savelli soon. She and her father and aunt are going to be at 'Heartease' for two or three months. Mabel Allison and her mother are coming east, and the Southards are coming home with Anne when their motion-picture work in California is done. I could go on naming plenty of other reasons, but those are the really important ones."

"I should say they were important ones," agreed Tom. "It sounds as though there were to be some lively times in Oakdale. I'm going to try to make my vacation cover the wed-

dings. I can't allow the Originals to get married, celebrate or jollificate without me."

"Oh, Tom, will you really?" cried Grace with enthusiasm. "I'll let you know the moment the date of the girls' weddings is set."

"Can you stay over until to-morrow, Tom?" asked Mrs. Gray. "Then we can go back to Oakdale on the late afternoon train."

"I'm afraid not, Aunt Rose, I'm a day late now. I'll have to take the night train for Washington. Let me see." He drew a time table from his coat pocket. "There is a train out of Overton at nine o'clock to-night. I'm due to catch it. But I'm going to take you all to dinner at the Tourraine and we are going for a drive afterward which will end at the station, where you will all see me on my desolate way. Are there any objections?"

"Nothing but delighted acceptances, my dear boy," assured his aunt, glancing fondly at her big, good-looking nephew. "I'll venture to answer for the girls, too."

"We'll come to Tom's dinner party, provided he has luncheon with us," stipulated Grace. "It's almost noon now. Mrs. Elwood will have luncheon ready at one. You'd better come with us, Tom. We are going to have strawberry shortcake with whipped cream, for dessert."

"You couldn't lose me," asserted Tom with slangy emphasis. "Shall I go on ahead and telephone for a car, Aunt Rose?"

"No, I'll walk to Wayne Hall with you children," decided Mrs. Gray.

"I wonder if there is anything else to be done," murmured Grace, surveying the living-room with anxious eyes. "Oh, my motto. It must hang directly above the archway."

"Where is it?" asked Elfreda. "We have time to put it up before we go to luncheon, and plenty of skilled laborers." She cast a laughing glance at Tom.

"It isn't made yet," confessed Grace. "Eva Allen's brother, who is an artist, is illuminating one for me."

"What is your motto, Grace?" asked Tom interestedly.

"'Blessed are they that have found their work,'" repeated Grace, her eyes on the spot where she intended the precious motto to hang. Mrs. Gray had walked on into the hall, so there was only one pair of eyes to see the sudden tightening of Tom's lips and the look of wistfulness which crept into his face, and that pair of eyes belonged to Elfreda.

"He cares a whole lot more for Grace than she cares for him," was Elfreda's quick appraisal. "At heart, Grace is still a little girl,

and will be for a long time to come. I hope when she does wake up it won't be another prince who will do the awakening."

CHAPTER IV

THE SECRET SESSION

"I FEEL more as though I were getting ready for a funeral than about to give a dinner for the Eight Originals," sighed Grace Harlowe, as she joined her mother on the shady front porch, a little white and gold work bag, which Miss Southard had brought her from Paris, swinging from her arm. "I can't realize that, within the next week, Nora and Jessica are actually going to become Mrs. Hippy Wingate and Mrs. Reddy Brooks. It seems ridiculous. Why it's only yesterday that Jessica's hair hung down her back in two braids, and Nora wore curls and short dresses."

"I can't imagine Hippy in the rôle of a dignified bridegroom," smiled Mrs. Harlowe. "He is far more likely to convulse the wedding party and upset the whole solemn service than to conduct himself with strict propriety."

"He insists that he will cover himself with glory if Reddy doesn't look at him, and Reddy

insists that he will sit and stare him out of countenance. David is to be Hippy's best man and Tom Gray Reddy's, while Jessica is to be Nora's maid of honor and Nora Jessica's matron of honor. She's to be married first, you know. Mabel, Anne, Miriam Nesbit, Eleanor Savelli and I are to be the bridesmaids at both weddings," went on Grace. "We'll have a reunion of all our friends. The Gibsons are at home, Judge Putnam and his sister are coming down earlier from the Adirondacks; then there are Eleanor and her father, Miss Nevin and the Southards. Every one who has played an active part in our home lives will be on hand to see the girls married."

"But how can Nora go away on a wedding journey and be Jessica's matron of honor, too?" asked Mrs. Harlowe.

"She and Jessica went over that point a dozen times. You see Nora's wedding takes place in the morning. She is going to have a wedding breakfast, then she and Hippy will go to the mountains for a week. They will return to Oakdale on the day of Jessica's wedding, and leave for a long trip west the next morning. That was the best way they could carry out a compact they made last June to serve as maids of honor for each other."

Mrs. Harlowe listened to Grace's flow of

eager talk with a smile of content on her fine face. To her fond eyes Grace looked absurdly immature in her simple frock of white dotted swiss. She was secretly glad that Overton, rather than marriage, had claimed her alert, self-reliant daughter for another year. Like every other mother she wished some day to see Grace happily settled in a home of her own, but she preferred to think of that someday as being still far distant.

Grace took out of her bag a guest towel she was embroidering. It was the last of the half dozen towels she had worked for Jessica's hope chest. She was not fond of needlework. She preferred to spend her spare time playing golf and tennis, or riding and walking. This, as well as the hemstitched table cloth and napkins she had completed for Nora, was a labor of love. Now as she bent painstakingly over her work, she smiled to herself and wove a tender thread of loyalty and love into the pattern.

A long clear trill caused her to raise her head quickly and spring to her feet with, "Here they are, at last!" She ran to meet them.

Three girls, or rather three young women, came loitering through the gate and up the walk, laughing gayly at something the girl in the center was relating for their benefit.

"Now what has Hippy done?" guessed Grace shrewdly.

"You might know it was something about him," said Jessica Bright. "This time it was a case of what was done to him. Tell the lady all over again, Nora."

"It certainly was funny," dimpled Nora. "You see, Grace, Hippy and Edith and I were going for a ride, last night, in his new car. We waited and waited for him and couldn't imagine why he didn't come. About ten o'clock he came tearing along at a speed that would have made a traffic officer turn pale. Edith and I were still sitting on the porch. I pretended I was dreadfully offended until he told me where he had been, then Edith and I laughed until we almost cried."

"Where had he been?" asked Grace curiously.

The three girls giggled in unison.

"Locked in the cellar," returned Nora mirthfully. "He was all ready to go for his car when he happened to remember that he wanted a wrench from the tool chest in the cellar. His father is away this week and there was no one in the house but the cook. She was all ready to go away for the evening, too. She didn't know Hippy was in the cellar, so she locked all the doors, the cellar door included, and went on her

way rejoicing. Hippy said he pounded and shouted and howled and wailed and pounded some more. Can't you imagine just how funny he must have looked? He couldn't climb out of the cellar windows, for they are too small and he is too fat, so he had to stay there until almost ten o'clock. He says he sat on the cellar steps most of the time and thought of the happy past. At last the cook came home and when he heard her walking around upstairs he pounded and shouted again. She thought he was a burglar, just as though a burglar would make all that noise, and wasn't going to let him out. He insists that he ruined his voice forever in trying to convince her that he was himself. He says his frenzied pleadings finally touched her adamant heart, and she opened the cellar door very cautiously at the rate of about a sixteenth of an inch per minute."

Grace laughed with the others, as Nora finished. "Poor Hippy," she commented, "he is always falling into difficulties. I must ask him about his evening in the cellar."

"Yes, do," urged Nora. "He tried to swear Edith and me to secrecy, but we refused to be sworn."

"It will make Reddy so happy," laughed Anne.

"Oh, Anne, dear, you don't know how splen-

did it seems to have you home again!" exclaimed Grace. "It's just like old times. I can't help feeling sad though. We thought when we were graduated from high school that our parting of the ways had come, but now that we are all standing on the verge of our life work, it seems to me that this is going to be the real parting. I can't help wondering if things will seem quite the same again when we gather home next year."

"Of course they will," declared practical Nora. "Grace Harlowe, don't you dare to grow gloomy and retrospective. We four are chums for life, and not all the weddings and stage careers and Harlowe House positions in the world can change us."

"I know they can't. I won't make any more excursions into the Valley of Doubt," promised Grace.

They had stopped on the walk to talk, now they moved slowly toward the veranda, four abreast, a bright-eyed, happy quartette. Mrs. Harlowe greeted her daughter's friends as affectionately as though they were her own children. "Did you bring your work, girls, or is it to be a case of idle hands?"

"Idle hands!" exclaimed Nora. "Far from it. Jessica has a blouse to finish and I have innumerable initials to embroider."

"I am the only idle one," confessed Anne. "I am sorry to say that I haven't the least desire to be industrious. I prefer to sit with my hands folded and watch the rest of you work. It sounds lazy, doesn't it?"

"Not a bit of it," declared Grace loyally. "You've done your work, Anne. It's time you took a rest. Make yourselves comfy, girls. Here, give me your hats and parasols. I'll put them in the hall."

In a moment Grace returned, and sitting down by Nora, who had stationed herself in the big porch swing, she picked up her work and began to embroider industriously.

For the space of half an hour the little company worked busily, keeping up a running accompaniment of merry conversation broken with light laughter. It was Nora's quick eyes which first saw Grace lay down her work with an impatient sigh. An instant later Grace discovered that Nora's industry was flagging. Mrs. Harlowe had just gone into the house. Anne was leaning back in her chair, her eyes fixed dreamily upon the far horizon, while Jessica, alone, plodded patiently along, too much absorbed in the development of the butterfly pattern she was embroidering to note that two of her companions were lagging. A sudden silence fell upon them all. It was

broken by Nora's quick tones. "I'll take it all back," she averred. "I'm strictly in favor of idle hands. Let's put our work away and go for a walk!"

"For this brilliant idea, we thank you," returned Anne, coming out of her dream in a hurry.

"Why not walk over to the old Omnibus House," suggested Grace.

"Brillianter and brillianter," nodded Nora. "What could be more fitting than to make a pilgrimage to the scenes of our high school days? I haven't been there in ages."

"Neither have I," was Grace's quick response. "It's only half-past three. We'll have plenty of time to go there and back before dinner. The boys won't be here until six o'clock. You know that Tom Gray arrived yesterday, I suppose? That makes the Eight Originals complete. We'll have to do without the Plus Two, because Miriam hasn't come home yet and Arnold won't be here until the night before Nora's wedding."

"How I miss Miriam," sighed Grace.

"We never dreamed when we were freshmen that she would ever be our close friend, did we?" asked Nora.

"She's a dear, and no mistake," agreed Jessica. Then, her glance straying to Anne,

"What makes Anne look so mysterious?"

Anne smiled. "I'll tell you the most surprising secret you ever heard, but not until we get to the Omnibus House and are seated in a row on the old stone steps behind it."

"Then let's away!" exclaimed Nora. "We won't need our hats. Two parasols will be enough to shade us from the sun."

Five minutes later the four girls trooped down the steps and strolled through the familiar streets in the direction of their old playground. The afternoon sun beamed so gently and kindly upon them that it was not long before they closed their parasols and walked with their heads uncovered to his tempered rays. To see a bevy of girls walking in the quiet streets of the little city without hats was the commonest sight, and the quartette attracted little attention as they sauntered along.

After leaving Oakdale behind, it was not more than ten minutes' walk across the fields to the quaint old stone house which had been the scene of so many of their high school revels.

"What a lot of good times we have had here," mused Nora reminiscently, as they paused before the quaint old building, that had once been a tavern, and was, goodness knew, how many years old. "Shall you ever forget the time we buried the hatchet?"

"Never!" chorused three emphatic voices.

"Wasn't Julia Crosby too ridiculous for words?" declared Jessica. Her smile of recollection was reflected in the faces of her friends.

"That reminds me," remarked Nora, "I have something to tell you girls too."

"Let's have a 'secret' session," proposed Jessica. "Every one who wishes to attend must be ready to tell a secret the moment we sit down on the steps."

" 'A secret is a secret, only, when known to three persons, two of which are dead,' " quoted Anne mischievously.

"These secrets mustn't be the heart-to-heart, keep-it-to-yourself-forever kind," stipulated Nora. "They mustn't be of the complex variety either. Dark secrets are also strictly tabooed from this session."

"Stop laying down rules and regulations," laughed Grace, "and let us form our secret row. I am eaten up with curiosity to know what Anne and Nora know."

"Are you eligible?" quizzed Nora. "That is the important question. Anne you must head the row. You began this session."

Anne complied obediently.

Nora sat down beside her.

Grace stood eyeing Nora thoughtfully. Then

her eyes sparkled. "I'm eligible," she announced as she made a third.

"So am I," declared Jessica a trifle soberly, taking her place at the other end of the row.

"Ladies and no gentlemen," announced Nora, rising and bowing profoundly to the three girls, "the great secret session of the four inseparables is about to begin. Remember, you are not limited to one secret. If you happen to know several, now is the time to tell them. Go ahead, Anne."

Nora seated herself again and with the eyes of her chums fixed expectantly upon her, Anne began the secret session.

CHAPTER V

THE WAY TO PERPETUAL YOUTH

"THIS isn't a secret that any one told me," stated Anne. "It's something I found out for myself. One of the two persons it concerns doesn't know it yet. Perhaps she will never know."

"How mysteriously interesting," commented Nora. "Hurry on with it, Anne. Who are the persons concerned?"

"Mr. Southard and"—Anne paused briefly to give due effect to her words—"Miriam."

A ripple of surprise passed along the row.

"What do you mean, Anne?" was Grace's quick question.

"I mean that for nearly four years Mr. Southard has cared for Miriam," replied Anne steadily.

Nora's puckered red lips emitted a surprised whistle.

"This *is* news," averred Jessica. "But Miriam could never care for him. He is so much older."

"How old do you imagine Mr. Southard to be, Jessica?" asked Anne slyly.

"Oh, I don't know. He must be——" Jessica paused reflectively. Then a sudden look of astonishment passed over her face. "Why how funny! He isn't really old. I don't believe he is as old as thirty-five, but he *seems* older."

Anne nodded. "He is thirty-three. That isn't very ancient, is it?"

"Miriam is twenty-four," mused Grace aloud. She is so brilliant, self-possessed and stunning that one feels as though she were even older than that. I know she is very fond of the Southards, but I don't believe she suspects that Mr. Southard——"

"She doesn't," put in Anne eagerly. "He has been careful that she shouldn't. I believe Miss Southard knows, but she would never say so, even to me. Do you remember the time we went to New York City for Thanksgiving, when we were freshmen at Overton, Grace? Well, it began then. I know him so thoroughly that I could see things that you girls couldn't. After that I took particular pains to notice the way he acted toward Miriam whenever they met, and, as Elfreda says, I could see his love for her grow and deepen. He cared a great deal last commencement, and he was so dreadfully afraid she'd find out that he actually kept away from her."

"I remember that," interposed Grace. "Miriam noticed it, too. She told me that she was afraid she had in some way offended Mr. Southard, for he treated her with almost distant courtesy. I suppose he imagines himself as being too old for Miriam."

"This *is* an interesting secret and no mistake," said Nora, wagging her head with satisfaction, "but what about poor Arnold Evans?"

"You are running ahead too fast, Nora," smiled Anne. "Remember Miriam doesn't suspect that Mr. Southard loves her. The chances are she doesn't nor never will care for him. But I'll be generous and tell you another se-

cret. Miriam and Arnold aren't the least bit in love with each other."

"Do you know, Anne, I've always thought that, too," agreed Grace. "They have always acted more like two good comrades."

"Exactly," replied Anne, "but, as far as I am concerned, girls, to me it would be a wonderful thing if some day Everett Southard and Miriam Nesbit should decide that they were necessary to each other's welfare. They are so admirably suited in temperament, disposition, and all that goes toward making two persons absolutely happy."

"Hear the sage expound life and love," giggled Nora. "What about poor David's future happiness?"

Anne flushed. "I can't answer that question," she said, after a little pause. "It does sound rather silly for me to go on talking about the love affairs of others when I can't settle my own. Not that I love David less, but acting more," she finished almost tremulously. "I move that we go on to the next secret."

"Mine is about Julia Crosby," began Nora, "and I can tell you in few words. She's engaged to a Harvard man."

"Really!" exclaimed Grace delightedly. "Where did you see her, Nora? I didn't know she was at home."

"She came home from the mountains yesterday. I saw her in Carlton's, that new confectioner's shop on Main Street. We had a sundae together and she told me all about it. She has known her fiancé for two years. She met him at a Harvard dance. He was graduated last June from the Harvard law school. The engagement hasn't been formally announced yet. She's going to give a luncheon to announce it. She wanted me to be sure and tell you three girls. She is coming to see you soon, Grace."

"I'll receive her with open arms," assured Grace.

"That was a nice secret," commented Anne. "Now, Grace."

"Our fairy godmother is coming to dinner to-night."

"Hurrah!" cried Anne, standing up and waving her hand. "I didn't know she was within two hundred miles of Oakdale. It seems years instead of weeks since I saw her. When did she arrive in Oakdale?"

"This morning. She telephoned me. In my last letter I mentioned my dinner to you girls, and said I wished she might be here too. She came home from the seashore a week earlier so as not to miss it. She didn't say not to tell you. I had been holding it back as a surprise. It

served me in good stead by making me eligible to Secret Row."

"Last but not least, Jessica," reminded Nora briskly.

"I was going to tell you this evening when we were all together, and Reddy promised to help me, but, somehow, I'd rather tell you now, while we are together on these dear old steps where we've had so much fun."

Something in Jessica's tone caused the eyes of her friends to search hers inquiringly. It carried with it unmistakable regret. It presaged parting.

"Reddy and I aren't going to live in Oakdale this winter. We—we—are going—to—Chicago to live."

"Oh!" Nora ejaculated, drawing her breath sharply. "Oh, Jessica!"

A painful silence fell upon the row of girls, whose voices had only a moment since rung out so gayly.

Nora sat staring straight ahead of her with quivering lips. Of the three girls she would miss Jessica the most sorely. Grace, too, felt that dreadful sense of loss, of which she had complained earlier in the afternoon, stealing down upon her. Anne's face wore a look of loving concern, but an expression of resignation to destiny, which was likely to lead one to

the ends of the earth, lurked in her somber eyes. She had learned young to bow with the best possible grace to the inevitable.

Suddenly a half-stifled sob broke the oppressive quiet.

"Nora, you mustn't," protested Jessica weakly, but Nora's curly head was already resting on Grace's comforting shoulder, and an instant afterward Jessica sought the consolation of the other shoulder.

"Girls, girls," soothed Grace, an arm around each, "you mustn't cry." Nevertheless she experienced a wild desire to lift up her voice and lament with them. "I know you looked forward to being together this winter. It's terribly disappointing, but you can write letters and visit each other, and next summer, Jessica, you must arrange to come to Oakdale and stay all summer. Why didn't you tell us before?"

"Reddy didn't know it until yesterday," faltered Jessica. "His father has taken over a large business there and he wants Reddy to manage it for him. Reddy's mother doesn't want to live in Chicago, so Mr. Brooks wants Reddy to go."

"It's the real parting of the ways," said Grace softly to Anne.

Anne nodded. "Still, if we had our choice as to whether we would like to go back and live

over our past or go on, I am sure we'd choose to go on," she said thoughtfully. "Don't you think so, Grace?"

"Of course we would," agreed Grace cheerfully. "Good gracious, girls!" she exclaimed in sudden consternation. "Whose familiar figures are those coming across the field? It must be later than I thought."

Nora's and Jessica's mourning heads bobbed up from Grace's shoulders with simultaneous alacrity.

"Hippy!" gasped Nora. "Do I look as though I'd been crying? I wouldn't have him know it for the world."

"Reddy!" recognized Jessica. "Are my eyes a sight?"

"Also David and Tom," added Anne. "No, children, you haven't wept enough to permanently disfigure your charming faces. If the boys had not appeared we might now be weeping in a melancholy row. I had no idea that Jessica's secret was to be a positive tragedy."

"Neither had I," responded Grace soberly, laying an affectionate hand on Jessica's arm.

There was no time for further remarks on the subject, for the four young men were crossing the last field in record time. As they neared the row of young women Hippy Wingate picked up his coat and pirouetted toward them, a wide

smile on his round face, as he chanted gayly in a high voice:

"Children go, to and fro
In a merry pretty row;
Faces bright, all alight,
'Tis a happy, happy sight.
Swiftly turning round and round,
Do not look upon the ground;
Follow me, full of glee,
Singing merrily."

With each line of the song Hippy executed a most astonishing figure, ending on "merrily" with a funny pas-seul that turned the sorrow of the lately disconsolate audience to laughter.

"How did you like that?" he inquired affably, as he landed directly in front of the steps. "Shall I sing the chorus now or would you prefer to hear it later."

"Later, by all means," flung back Nora.

"As you please. As you please," returned Hippy with a careless wave of his hand. "I am not chary of my art. I ask for but one recompense."

"There he goes," groaned Dave Nesbit.

"I'm not going," retorted Hippy, with dignity. "I'm standing perfectly still. However, I did not come away out here in this field to

quarrel with you, David Nesbit. I came because I am a——"

"Nuisance," suggested Reddy.

"Precisely. No, I don't mean anything of the sort. I am not a nuisance. A nuisance is a tall, thin, conceited person with flaming red hair, pale blue eyes, a freckled nose and a slanderous tongue. His name begins with R and he is——"

Without finishing his sentence Hippy took to his heels and disappeared around the corner of the Omnibus House, with an agility worthy of a better cause.

"I'll see that he keeps at a safe distance from us till we start for Grace's," was Reddy's grim comment. "You'll see his head appear at that corner in a minute, and then, look out!"

They waited in mirthful silence. True to Reddy's prediction Hippy's round face was suddenly thrust into view. Reddy leaped toward him. There was a horrified, "Oh, dreadful!" from Hippy, and the sound of running feet.

"He's afraid of me," boasted Reddy in a purposely loud tone.

"Don't you ever believe it," contradicted Hippy's voice. "I like the view from this side of the Omnibus House. I think Nora would like it, too."

"Such thoughtfulness is rare," jeered David.

" 'Tis better to have thought such thoughts, than never to have thought at all," retorted the voice plaintively.

"Let's eradicate him from the face of the earth, Reddy," proposed David. "He's a blot upon the community."

"No-r-a," wailed the voice, "aren't you going to help your little friend?"

"Rescue him, Nora," declared David disgustedly. "That's the reason he created all this disturbance."

Nora dimpled, the pink in her cheeks deepening.

"Yes, do," urged Grace. "It is high time for us to start home. We must be there to receive Mrs. Gray."

"She sent me on ahead," informed Tom. "I wanted to wait and bring her over in my car, but she is going to have Haynes bring her over in the carriage."

Nora disappeared around the corner of the house, but reappeared immediately, leading by the hand a broadly smiling Hippy, who carried a huge bouquet of buttercups and daisies in his free hand and cavorted at her side as joyously as the proverbial lambkin on the green.

"You can lead the way with him, Nora," directed David. "I wouldn't trust him to bring

up the rear. Reddy and I want him where we can keep an eye upon him."

"Certainly we shall lead the way," flung back Hippy, "but not because you say so. Our superior rank places us in the front row of the procession. Come on, Nora. May I sing and dance? I haven't sung the chorus yet, you know."

Without waiting for permission Hippy pranced ahead of her on his toes, swaying from side to side and scattering the flowers from his bouquet, his voice rising in a falsetto chorus of:

"Singing merrily, merrily, merrily,
Follow me, full of glee,
Singing merrily."

"He'll never grow old," said Anne, as she watched Hippy's ridiculous performance.

"Neither will the rest of the Eight Originals," reminded Grace loyally. "Remember, we have a Fairy Godmother who has taught us the secret of perpetual youth."

"What's the secret?" asked David innocently. He was fond of hearing Grace's enthusiastic views of things.

"Never lose one's grip on life," she answered simply.

And as the Eight Originals strolled home through the radiant sunset, in each young soul stirred the resolve to take a firm grip on life and keep eternally young at heart, no matter what the years might bring forth.

CHAPTER VI

JESSICA'S WEDDING

"JESSICA BRIGHT you will never look prettier in your life than you do tonight!" exclaimed Grace Harlowe, as she stood off a little from her friend and gazed at her with loving eyes.

A wave of color dyed Jessica's pale cheeks. "I'm so glad that you think so," she breathed. "Do you know, girls, I have always hoped that I'd look nicer on my wedding day than at any other time. I'm glad I decided to have a green and white wedding, too.

"You always used to say that you were going to have a pink rose wedding," reminded Anne. "What made you change your mind."

"Promise you won't laugh and I'll tell you," said Jessica solemnly.

It was the evening of Jessica's wedding and Mabel Allison, Anne Pierson, Miriam Nesbit,

Eleanor Savelli, Nora, now Mrs. Hippy Wingate, and Grace gathered about their friend with voluble promises of eternal secrecy. They were in Jessica's room saying good-bye to Jessica Bright, so soon to become Jessica Brooks.

"I changed my mind," informed Jessica impressively, "on account of Reddy's hair."

"'On account of Reddy's hair,'" repeated Grace. "Why——" Then, catching Nora's eye, she laughed.

"You know how dreadfully pink and red clash," Jessica went on, with a faint giggle, "but I had never thought of it until one night when Reddy was sitting on our porch. He wrapped my pink scarf around his neck just for fun, and I made up my mind then and there not to have a pink wedding. Finally, I chose green and white, and I'm glad now, because he will look so much nicer."

"I think that was very sweet in you, Jessica," said Eleanor Savelli decidedly.

"Some of us ought to tell Reddy of Jessica's thoughtfulness," teased Anne.

"Just as though any of you would," replied Jessica, fondly surveying the smiling faces of her friends.

"You are very sure of us, aren't you, Jessica?" said Grace gayly.

"And always shall be," answered Jessica simply. "Do you remember, girls, when I was about fourteen how frightfully sentimental I used to be. I read every love story I could lay hands on. I was forever imagining my wedding day. My bridegroom was always tall and dark, with piercing black eyes and a kingly air, and I always pictured myself as wearing a pink satin dress and being married in church. Sometimes fate parted us at the altar and sometimes we lived happily ever afterward. I used to plan that on the day of my wedding I would lock myself in my room, put on my pink satin dress and sit all day in rapt meditation. I would eat nothing, and see no one, not even, father, until the moment when I swept grandly out into the hall and down the stairs to my carriage. Of course, I was transcendently beautiful and there were always two or three disappointed lovers, who came to the church and cast sad, yearning eyes upon me as I glided up the center aisle with my hero. I never dreamed, then, that Reddy Brooks, my schoolmate and playfellow, was to be my destiny," she continued, her eyes growing tender, "or that I should begin my journey with him in our dear old parlor, surrounded by my chums. I haven't the least desire to sit alone and moon and meditate. I want all of you with me. It seems the

most natural thing in the world that I should walk down the same old stairs to the same old parlor to meet the same old Reddy, just as I've done dozens of times before."

"It's five minutes to eight, girls," announced Miriam Nesbit. "Say, good-bye to Jessica Bright, and don't one of you dare to shed a tear."

One after another the girls embraced Jessica. Nora was last. She and Jessica remained in each other's arms for a long, sweet moment. Their devotion was as deep and true as that which existed between Grace and Anne.

"Here are the flower girls. It's time, Jessica," said Grace softly, as the two little girls who had been chosen to act in that capacity entered the room accompanied by Ellen, the Brights' old servant, who had been in the household since Jessica's babyhood. They were pretty, dark-haired children, cousins of Jessica's, and wore white lace frocks over pale green silk. On their heads were wreaths of tiny double white daisies and they carried small baskets filled to overflowing with the same flower.

Quietly the little procession began to form. Nora, as matron of honor, followed the flower girls. She wore her wedding gown of white satin, and carried a huge armful of white roses.

Then came the bride. As Grace had said Jessica would, in all probability, never look lovelier than in her wedding dress of white satin. Her veil of wonderful yellow-white old lace, was an heirloom, Jessica being the fourth bride in the family to wear it, and her bouquet was a shower of lilies of the valley. Jessica possessed a dazzlingly white skin, and the purity of her complexion had never showed to better advantage. Her deeply blue eyes were dark with reverence and her whole face radiated a tender happiness that made it rarely lovely. The bridesmaids wore gowns of white chiffon over pale green chiffon which blended into a misty, seafoam effect. Dainty girdles of palest green satin and exquisite hair ornaments composed of tiny chiffon flowers and satin leaves, together with white satin slippers and white silk stockings, completed their costumes, and they carried shower bouquets of white sweet peas.

Down the stairs swept the bridal procession to the strains of Mendelssohn's wedding march played by the orchestra, stationed in a palm-screened corner of the wide hall. It was the same old orchestra which had become so closely identified with the good times of the Eight Originals during their high school days. Jessica had declared laughingly that it would

seem almost a sacrilege to think of being married to the strains of a wedding march that was not played by them. At the foot of the stairs the bride was met by her father, and the wedding party moved slowly into and down the long parlor to the bow window at the end of the room which had been transformed into a fairy bower of green. Before a bank of ferns, white roses and white sweet peas stood the old clergyman who had said the last solemn words over Jessica's mother years before, and who had come from another city, many miles distant, to marry Jessica and Reddy. Here it was that the bridegroom, accompanied by his best man, Tom Gray, awaited his one-time playmate, his boyhood friend, his first and only sweetheart, who had now come in all the bravery of her wedding finery to place her hands, trustingly, confidently in his for the journey over the untrodden trail they were to blaze together.

A soft murmur that was almost a sigh went up from the assembled guests as Mr. Bright handed his most precious treasure into the keeping of the man who had claimed her for his own, and the beautiful Episcopal ring service began. Jessica's responses were clear and unfaltering, while Reddy's firm earnest tones carried conviction of the sincerity of his vows.

Notwithstanding the fact that the appellation of "Reddy," by which he was known throughout Oakdale, arose from his unmistakably red hair, Lawrence Brooks looked singularly handsome on his wedding night and the expression of proud affection in his eyes, as he took Jessica's hand, was plainly indicative of the love he bore her.

The moment the ceremony was over Reddy kissed Jessica, who lifted loving eyes to his, then, turning, wound both arms about her father's neck. The bridesmaids quickly hemmed them in and the guests crowded about them to offer their congratulations. Only the intimate friends of Reddy and Jessica had been invited to attend the ceremony, Mrs. Allison, the Southards, the Putnams, Mrs. Gibson, Eva Allen and James Gardner, Julia Crosby, Marian Barber, Mrs. Gray, Miss Nevin, Guido Savelli, Arnold Evans, Donald Earle, the immediate families of the bride and groom and the families of the rest of the Eight Originals Plus Two.

The reception, which was to begin at half-past eight, included the greater part of Oakdale's younger set, and before it was over Reddy and Jessica were to slip away and motor to the next town, there to catch the night train to New York. From there they were to take a

boat bound for the West Indies where they had planned to spend a month's honeymoon, then journey to their Chicago home.

"Well, Reddy," declared Hippy condescendingly, when, a little later the Eight Originals stood near the flower bank indulging in a brief old-time chat before the arrival of the reception guests, "I must say that you did very well, and Jessica, too." He beamed on the bride, with a wide patronizing smile that caused her new dignity to vanish in a giggle of ready appreciation of the irrepressible Hippy. "I hoped that you, Reddy, would glance at me for inspiration. There you stood, like a wooden Indian, I mean a marble statue, and never winked. But as you stood there a beautiful thought came to me. I understood precisely why the name of 'Reddy' was appropriate to you. The electric light shone softly down upon your gleaming Titian locks, as though to call attention to their crimson glory. There was a look of——"

"Nora, if you value the life of your husband, remove him," broke in David Nesbit decisively. "Reddy is trying to behave with the becoming dignity of a newly-wed, and I appeal to you, how can he?"

"He can't," agreed Nora. "I'll remove the obstacle at once."

"You'll have to use strategy to do it," announced Hippy.

" 'Come one, come all, this rock shall fly
From its firm base as soon as I!' "

he quoted determinedly, with jerky little gestures. Planting himself behind Jessica, he caught up a corner of her veil and peered defiantly through it at David.

"You haven't seen the bride's table in the tent yet, have you, Hippy?" inquired Grace innocently. "It looks so pretty."

"The bride's table!" Hippy's defiant face broke into an expansive, affable grin. "No, but I'd love to see it. Show it to me, instantly."

"I'll take charge of him, Grace," interposed Nora. "If he inspects the refreshment tent it must be under guard."

"I've changed my mind. I don't care to see it. I'd rather stay here and offer a few more congratulations to Reddy. Grace's strategy was very clever, but Nora's bullying is all wrong. I won't be taken charge of."

But in spite of his vigorous protests Nora slipped her arm through his and piloted him in the direction of the huge refreshment tent which had been erected on the lawn. There

the wedding supper was to be served by caterers at small tables.

"What a treasure Hippy is," said Anne, as the group of young people smilingly watched Hippy and Nora out of sight. "He is so funny and nice that he takes away that half-sad feeling that one almost always has at a wedding. I am sure I don't know why seeing two friends made happy should inspire one with a desire to cry, but it does."

"Weddings and commencements are always more or less solemn and productive of weeps," answered Grace. "Remember not one of us is going to shed a tear when Jessica leaves us. This has been such a sweet, happy wedding that we mustn't spoil its gladness. Of course, I can't imagine you boys lifting up your voices in lamentation, but I'm not so sure of the feminine half of the Eight Originals."

"I couldn't help crying a little when Nora was married," confessed Jessica. "A church wedding seems so much more solemn, and Hippy was far too busy being a dignified bridegroom to say funny things."

"He was perfect, wasn't he?" agreed Anne earnestly. "I never dreamed he could look so reverent and devoted. I don't know which was nicer, Jessica, Nora's wedding or yours. They were both beautiful." Happening to catch

David's grave eyes fixed searchingly upon her she flushed and said hastily, "It must be almost time for the reception to begin."

"So it is, and if I'm not mistaken here come the first guests," remarked Tom Gray.

For the next hour Jessica and Reddy were kept busy receiving the congratulations of the steady inpouring of friends who came to wish them godspeed. Then followed the wedding supper, and it was almost eleven o'clock when Jessica slipped away from her guests, and a little later, appeared at the head of the stairs in a smart tailored suit of brown, with hat, shoes and gloves to match. No secret had been made of their departure, for their friends were not of those who delighted in playing embarrassing and discomforting pranks. In fact, the majority of the reception guests had departed, and it was their intimate friends who were to see them off on their journey.

Surrounded by her loved ones, Jessica made a second triumphal journey down the stairs. In the hall a halt was made and the dreaded good-byes began. Jessica clung first to her father, then to her aunt. Her chums came next and she was passed from one to the other of them with warm expressions of affection and good will. Then the procession moved on and the second halt was made at the drive where a

limousine stood waiting to receive the bridal pair. It glided away amid a shower of rice and several old shoes, which had been carefully selected beforehand by Hippy, David and Grace, leaving six of the Eight Originals gazing after it with eloquent eyes in which lay the meaning of "Auld Lang Syne."

"I love weddings," gushed Hippy sentimentally, as the six strolled back to the house. "I hope I shall have at least two more wedding invitations this year."

No one answered this pointed sally. Nora gave her loquacious husband's arm a warning pinch.

"Stop pinching my arm, Nora," he protested in a grieved tone. "How can you be so cruel to little me?"

This was too much for the silent four. They looked into each other's eyes and laughed. Then Dave said quietly, "Not this year, old man."

"Perhaps we can promise you one for next fall, Hippy," said Anne, with a sudden temerity which surprised her as well as the others.

"Anne!" David's voice vibrated with newborn hope. For the instant he forgot everything except the fact that Anne had at last approached some degree of definiteness regarding their future.

"I said 'perhaps,'" laughed Anne, but be-

hind her laughter David read the blessed truth that in Anne's secret heart there was no "perhaps," and the little hand which lay so contentedly in his, as they strolled up the walk to the house, made the assurance of his new joy doubly sure.

"Why can't you make me happy too, Grace?" asked Tom in a low, reproachful tone. They had dropped a little to the rear of the others.

"I'm sorry, Tom," faltered Grace, "but I can't. I am fonder of you than any other man I know, but it is the fondness of long friendship. I'm not looking forward to marriage. It is my work that interests me most. I don't love you as Anne loves David, and Jessica and Nora love Reddy and Hippy. I don't believe I know what love means. I don't wish to hurt you, but I must be perfectly honest with myself and with you. I can only say that I care for no one else, and that perhaps someday I may care as much as you."

Grace gazed sorrowfully at Tom as she ended. She knew by the tightening of his lips and the nervous squaring of his broad shoulders that she had hurt him sorely.

"All right, Grace," he said with brave finality. "I'll try to be content with your friendship and live in the hope of that 'someday.'

I'm going to be selfish enough to dream that their will come a time when even your work won't be able to crowd out love."

Grace made no reply. She felt that there was nothing to be said. The bare idea that there might come a time when her beloved work would fail to fill her life was not to be considered, even for a moment. Love was a vague, far-distant possibility. It might come to her, and again it might not. But her work—that lay directly before her. The glory of life was not love, but achievement. Her eyes grew rapt with purpose, and, as Tom wistfully scanned her changeful face, it fell upon him with a sudden sinking of the heart that for him the longed-for "someday" might never come.

CHAPTER VII

THE RETURN OF EMMA DEAN

"'A HORSE, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!'" chanted a voice in Grace Harlowe's ear.

Grace whirled about, almost dropping the suit case and golf bag she carried.

"Why, Emma, *Emma Dean!*" she exclaimed, her voice rising high in astonishment.

"Yes, it's Emma, *Emma Dean,*" returned Emma humorously. "It is I, me, myself and all the other personally personal pronouns that stand for your old friend, Emily Elizabeth Dean."

"Wherever did you come from and—oh, Emma"—as the tall thin young woman pointed significantly to two heavy suit cases and a small leather bag huddled together on the station platform—"you aren't really—are you——"

"I am," interrupted Emma cheerfully. "I couldn't stay away. I knew you'd need a comforter this year, so I applied for the position and you can see for yourself how successful I was. Professor Morton was so grateful to me for applying that he said with tears in his eyes, 'Emma, I can't tell you how happy it makes me——' "

"Emma Dean, stop talking nonsense and tell me how you really happened to be here. It's too good to be true." Grace beamed fondly on her tall, humorous classmate who had been a never-failing source of amusement to the Wayne Hall girls.

"Since you are determined to have facts, here goes. I've come back to Overton, the land of the dig and the home of the sage, to show what four years of unremittent toil have done for me. I am to be a living testimonial, one of

the 'after taking the prescribed course I can cheerfully recommend, etc.,' kind. Briefly and explicitly, I dropped off that train from the south that came in just before your train, and I'm going to be Miss Duncan's assistant in English."

"You aren't really!" Grace's eyes were dancing. "How splendid! Why I didn't know you intended to teach."

"Neither did I," returned Emma, a shadow flitting across her face, "until I went home last June and found that things hadn't been going as smoothly as they might. Mother and Father never gave me the slightest inkling last year that money wasn't plentiful in the Dean family. Dear, unselfish things! They wanted my college life to end in a blaze of glory. You see, Father had put most of his little capital into a real estate boom that didn't boom, and it left him with a lot of vacant lots on his hands that no one, not even himself, wanted. A trolley line was to pass through the section he owned and it changed its mind, or rather the directors changed theirs, and straggled off in another direction. So, unless it straggles back again and Father gets rid of his incubus, which isn't at all likely, the eldest daughter of the noble house of Dean will have to hustle indefinitely for her board and keep.

"Why, Emma Dean!" Exclaimed Grace.

"To go back a little, as soon as I noticed how worried Father looked, and after I surprised Mother crying one day, I made them tell me all about it. I wrote straight to Professor Morton. He helped me secure the position of assistant in English, and here I am. I haven't the least idea where I'm going to live either. I'd love to go back to Wayne Hall, but I'm afraid I couldn't preserve a proper attitude of dignity there. You know my failings. Beverly Place is a house given over to teachers. I thought I'd try there first. I hope it won't be too expensive. I expect to send some money home this year."

Grace had listened attentively to Emma's recital. What a splendid girl Emma was! She had not tried to dodge Life and his inseparable comrades, Trouble and Hard Work. Instead, she had walked out courageously, fearlessly, to meet them with smiling lips and a merry heart. Grace was already enlivened by the prospect of having this free-hearted, jolly classmate with her during the college year now opening.

"How I wish you could live near me, Emma," she said longingly. Then she stared at her friend with wide-open eyes, the expression of which betokened the birth of an amazing idea. "Why—you can," she declared.

"I've just thought of the nicest way. Will you come, Emma? Will you?"

"It depends on the exact spot where the pleasure of my company is requested," returned Emma waggishly. "If it is to Kamptchatka—no, most decidedly. I have no insane craving for life among the heathen, and that 'no' includes the Malay Archipelago and darkest Africa. It's too cold in Greenland and I couldn't countenance terrible Thibet, but if its any place nearer home, say Hunter's Rock or Vinton's, I'll be delighted."

Grace laughed happily. "It's a place you haven't guessed or thought of," she replied. "I want you to come to Harlowe House and room with me, Emma. I'm going to have lots of room, a whole suite. There's a sitting-room, a bedroom and a bath. I need some one to help me and I'd rather have you than any one else I know. Won't you say 'yes'? Please, please, do."

Emma regarded Grace with a look of one who could not believe the evidence of her own ears. "Oh—I couldn't—it wouldn't be right to impose upon you. I'd love to, but——"

"Wait until you see Harlowe House before you make up your mind not to live there," interposed Grace slyly. "We'll call a taxicab and go over to it at once. I have my own key,

so we can leave our luggage and go to Vinton's or any other place we wish for luncheon. You can spend the night at Harlowe House. We won't be alone there, for the cook and both maids are supposed to arrive to-day. After you have enjoyed a few hours of my beneficent society you may refuse to be torn from me and my sheltering home," she ended banteringly.

"I haven't the least doubt of it," averred Emma in a perfectly serious tone. "That's why I feel as though I ought to decide now while I am in my most heroic mood. I never dreamed of any such wonderful good fortune. Honestly, Grace, I don't know what to say."

"Say 'yes,' " advocated Grace. "You ought to be willing to come if I am willing to have you. If it will make you feel more independent, you may pay for your meals. I'll see that you are not overcharged, but as far as the room is concerned you are welcome to it. Oh, Emma, think how delightful it will be for us! I say 'will' because you simply can't find yourself hard-hearted enough to refuse. I'm not obliged to consult a soul about my plans. Mrs. Gray gave me full permission to do as I think best. I have no set expense limit. I am to be prudent and economical, of course; that's part of

my trust. After this year there will be an expense limit. We shall know by next June just what it costs for the up-keep of a house like Harlowe House. This year, however, we are bound to do more or less experimenting."

Grace gazed pleadingly at Emma, who stood in the middle of the station platform, her heavy eyebrows drawn together in deep thought.

"I'm going for that taxicab," said Grace, as Emma still remained silent. "There's one coming into the station yard now." She signaled to the driver, who drew up directly in front of where they were standing, then sprang out and began loading the girls' luggage in the car.

"Come on, Emma," coaxed Grace. "You can finish making up your mind on the way to Harlowe House."

Emma turned to her friend with a face full of affectionate gratitude. "I'm going to accept your offer, Grace," she declared. "In fact, I can't resist it. I am sure you want me to come and I don't know of any other place where I'd rather be. I can't begin to tell you how much it means to me, and in so many different ways. Are you sure there won't come a time when you'll think, 'Oh, if only I had never asked that noisy, nervous, nosing, messy, meddlesome, moping, miserable, growling, grum-

bling, grouchy, greedy, galloping, galumphing Emma Dean to room with me?' "

"I don't know any such person," denied Grace, laughing merrily at Emma's remarkable self-arraignment. "It sounds more like a Thesaurus than a category of your failings, Emma. Come along. We mustn't keep this man waiting."

Emma dutifully climbed into the automobile. "One never knows what will happen next," she remarked naïvely as they seated themselves in the car. "I feel as Cinderella must have felt when she was suddenly whisked off to the ball by her fairy godmother. By the way, Grace, how is Mrs. Gray, the fairy godmother of Harlowe House?"

"I've been so busy coaxing you to come and live with me, I forgot to tell you that she and I were down here in August, and who do you suppose we had as a visitor?"

"Arline Thayer?" asked Emma.

"No; but that wasn't a bad guess. J. Elfreda was with us."

"Bless her!" Emma's exclamation told plainly of her affection for the one-time stout girl. "Was she as funny as ever?"

"Every bit. She kept Mrs. Gray and I in a perpetual state of laughter. She's going to study law in New York City, and she's promised to come to Overton for Thanksgiving. Ar-

line Thayer and Mabel Ashe are coming too. We'll have a great celebration."

"I'm certainly glad I'm here," sighed Emma contentedly. "There seems to be a prospect of one continuous round of pleasure."

"I'm glad you are here too," nodded Grace. "You don't know how queerly I felt to-day when I stepped off the train without seeing a soul I knew. I suppose there are a number of girls here, although it's early. Classes won't be called for at least a week or more. We'll surely see some familiar spirits soon. There are Patience Eliot, Kathleen West, Laura Atkins, Mildred Evans, Violet Darby, Myra Stone and ever so many others still due in the land of Overton."

"Why, that's so," declared Emma, her eyes bright with the prospect of seeing her Overton friends. "Do you know, Grace, I'm ashamed to say I hadn't really considered those girls. All along I've thought about the Sempers and how strange and gray everything would seem without them."

"I know it," sighed Grace. "I've felt exactly the same. Anne, Miriam, Arline, Ruth, Elfreda and you were my absent crushes, but now you are a present one, and next to you comes Patience Eliot. She always seemed like a senior. I think I'm going to love the new Kath-

leen West dearly. She is so clever, and now that we are friends I hope we can work together in ever so many ways."

As the taxicab bore them swiftly toward Harlowe House the two young women talked on of the happy past with its pleasure-marked milestones.

"We're almost there. Look, Emma! You can get a splendid view of all the campus houses. Now isn't Harlowe House the prettiest of them all?"

"It is, I swear it," returned Emma solemnly, "and, if I'm not mistaken, one of your household has arrived ahead of you. Certainly some one is camping out on the front steps."

"Why, so there is. I wonder who she can be. One of the maids, I suppose, or perhaps the cook. We'll know who she is in a minute."

The car had now come to a full stop. Without waiting for the chauffeur Grace opened the door and sprang out. "Never mind our luggage," she said as she paid the driver. "We'll carry it into the house. It's not very heavy."

Gathering her belongings in one hand, and picking up one of Emma's suit cases, Grace set off up the stone walk followed by Emma. As she advanced there rose from the steps and came to meet her a most astonishing little figure.

CHAPTER VIII

A STRANGE APPLICANT

"THIS is Harlowe House, isn't it?" was the sharp question that assailed Grace's ears.

"Yes." Grace's eyes traveled in amazement over the curious little stranger within her gates. She was a girl of perhaps eighteen, although there was a strained, anxious expression in her large brown eyes that made her look positively aged, an effect which the three deep lines in her high projecting forehead served to emphasize. If she possessed hair it was not visible under the small round hat of a by-gone style which set down upon her head like a helmet. She wore a plain, cheap black skirt and a queer, old-fashioned white blouse made with a peplum. Around her waist was a leather belt, and on her feet were coarse heavy shoes such as a farm laborer might wear. In one hand she carried a large bundle, in a newspaper wrapping.

"I'm so glad. I thought I'd never get here," she said simply.

Grace and Emma exchanged amazed glances. This must be the maid. But such a maid!

"Are you the young woman Mrs. Elwood engaged?" asked Grace politely.

The girl shook her head. "I don't know what you mean. No one engaged me. I just came because I heard about Harlowe House and wanted to go to college. I've passed all my high school examinations and I've a scholarship too. They wouldn't let me come, so I ran away from home and walked all the way here. Is it true that a girl can live at Harlowe House without having to pay her board?" she eyed Grace with a look of mingled anxiety and defiance.

"Oh," Grace's amazed look changed to one of interested concern, "pardon me. I thought you were a young woman of whom Mrs. Elwood, of Wayne Hall, had spoken."

"I don't know Mrs. Elwood. I never heard of Wayne Hall. I don't know a soul in this town. I only know that I want to go to Overton College more than I ever wanted anything else in my life. Do you suppose there's a chance for me to live at Harlowe House and study? I've walked over a hundred miles to find out," finished the queer little stranger pleadingly.

"'Over a hundred miles!'" repeated Grace and Emma in chorus.

The girl nodded solemnly.

"You poor child!" exclaimed Emma Dean

impulsively. "If your wish to be an Overton girl brought you that distance on foot, I should say you ought to have all the chance there is. At any rate you have applied to the proper authority. This is Miss Harlowe, for whom Harlowe House was named, and who is to be in charge of it. I am Miss Dean, of 19— and now assistant in English at Overton."

But the knowledge that she was face to face with the person who held the privilege of being a member of Harlowe House in her hands overcame the quaint stranger with a sudden shyness. She shifted her weight uneasily from one foot to the other, twisted her thin, bony hands nervously, while her forehead was corrugated afresh with deep wrinkles.

With the frank, winning smile which was one of Grace's chief charms, she held out her hand to the other girl. "I am glad to know you," she said. "Won't you tell me your name?"

"Mary Reynolds," returned the newcomer in a low voice, as she timidly shook Grace's proffered hand, then Emma's.

"I shall be glad to welcome you to Harlowe House," said Grace cordially, "provided you can fulfill the requirements necessary for entering Overton. I am going over to Miss Wilder's office this afternoon, and if you wish to go with

me you can learn all the particulars. Until then, however, you had better come into the house with Miss Dean and me. I am sure you must be very tired."

"Yes, I am, but I don't mind that. I'm here and nothing else matters," returned the girl so fervently that Grace felt a sudden mist rise to her eyes, and she determined, then and there, that if this curious, destitute little stranger succeeded in measuring up to Overton's mental requirements, she would smooth in every possible way her path, which she foresaw would be troubled.

"And now for our triumphal entry into Harlowe House," declaimed Emma Dean, as she and Grace picked up their luggage, and, followed by Mary Reynolds and her huge newspaper-wrapped bundle, mounted the steps. At the door Grace again set down her luggage. Fumbling for her latch key she fitted it to the lock.

"What a perfectly delightful place!" was Emma's enthusiastic cry, as she stepped into the hall which was done in oak with furnishings to match. "Commend me to the living-room!" She poked her head inquisitively through the soft green silk hangings and after surveying the pretty room for an instant made a dive for the window seat. "Oh, you window

seat!" she laughed with a fine disregard for dignity.

Grace laughed with her, and queer little Mary Reynolds smiled in sheer sympathy with Emma's irresistible drollery.

"I choose this green window seat for my boon companion," declared Emma, curling her wiry length cosily upon it, "and may I be ever faithful to my vows. I expect to have difficulty in protecting my claim, for I predict this will be the most popular spot in the house. May I put up a sign, Grace. 'This claim is staked by Emma Dean, no others need apply'?"

"You may stake it, but I won't guarantee that it will stay staked," replied Grace.

"Oh, yes, it will," argued Emma confidently, bouncing up and down on the soft springy cushions. "The freshmen of Harlowe House will be so impressed with my height, dignity and general appearance that they will defer to me as a matter of course. One imperious look, like this, over my glasses, and the world will be mine." She peered over her glasses at Grace in a ludicrous fashion which was far more likely to convulse, rather than impress, the prospective freshmen.

Even the solemn stranger giggled outright, then looked as though she had been caught red-handed in some dreadful crime.

"I'd like to recite English in one of your classes, Emma," smiled Grace.

"Now there is just where you are wrong," retorted Emma. "I shan't have a single amusing feature in my daily round of recitations. I shall be as grim as grim can be and a regular slave driver as far as lessons are concerned. Those freshmen will wish they'd never met me." Emma wagged her head threateningly.

"Stop making such dire threats and come upstairs to see our quarters," commanded Grace.

Emma uncoiled herself from the window seat with alacrity and began gathering up her belongings.

Grace turned kindly to Mary Reynolds. "If you will come upstairs with us, Miss Reynolds, I think we can easily find a room for you. So far I do not know just how many applications Miss Wilder has received. As I told you, I am going over to the office after luncheon. You had better go to your room and rest a little, then take luncheon with Miss Dean and me and go with us to Overton Hall to see Miss Wilder, the dean."

"I—I—thank you," stammered the girl, the dull color flooding her sunburnt cheeks. "I'm afraid—I—can't go to luncheon—with you. I'm —not—very hungry."

Emma Dean flashed a quick, appraising glance at her from under her eyelashes. "Neither are we," she assured the embarrassed girl, "but still we don't care to miss luncheon entirely. You are a stranger in a strange land, so you must be our guest, and then some day when you are a seasoned Overtonite we'll insist on being yours."

Mary Reynolds regarded the two young women with shy, grateful eyes. "You are so good to me. You must know, of course, that I am very poor. I have nothing in the world but this bundle of clothes and ten dollars," she said humbly. "It took me two years to save it. I have been so sure that there would be some little corner of this wonderful house for me. I can't bear to think that I may be too late. I don't know where I'd go. I guess I'd have to try to find some place else. Do you suppose I am too late?" Her tones vibrated with alarm.

"Of course you aren't," soothed Emma Dean. "I'm always late, but, as I used to tell Miss Harlowe, I am hardly ever too late. You may be almost the first girl to apply, or you may be among the latest, but not the too latest. There, isn't that encouraging? The best thing for you to do is to have an early luncheon and a long sleep. Suppose we go down to Vinton's,

Grace, as soon as we get the fond souvenirs of the railroad off our faces. Then I'll come back here with Miss Reynolds and you can go on to Overton to see Miss Wilder. My business with her will keep until to-morrow. This little girl is too tired for interviews to-day."

"I think that's dear in you, Emma, and real wisdom too. Now let's go upstairs, at once." Grace led the way and the trio ascended to the second story.

"I'm going to put you in this room for the present, Miss Reynolds," said Grace. She paused before a door that faced the head of the stairs and threw it open. It was a pretty room, papered in dainty blue and white, with a blue and white floor rug and white enameled furniture. There were crisp, white dotted-swiss curtains at the windows and a sheer blue and white ruffled cover on the dressing table, while on the walls hung several neatly-framed water color and pen and ink sketches.

The shabby, tired girl gave a long sigh of satisfaction and weariness as she stood in the middle of the floor, her eyes eagerly devouring the pretty room.

"The bathroom is at the end of the hall," said Grace gently. "We'll stop for you in about half an hour."

The other girl did not answer, and Grace and

Emma slipped away, leaving her to get used to her new surroundings.

"Well, did you ever?" asked Emma, the moment they were inside Grace's sitting-room with the door closed.

Grace shook her head. "Poor little thing," she murmured. "She can't possibly go about Overton in those clothes, Emma. Yet I can't offer her any of mine. She seems independent. I am afraid she would resent it. I wonder what her story is. Did you notice she said that 'they' wouldn't let her go to college, so she had run away from home? Suppose some one of her family should follow her here just after we had nicely established her at Harlowe House? We must find out everything about her. I won't bother her with questions while she is so tired."

"I am sure she is eighteen," declared Emma positively. "That will free her from parental sway in this state. I think it would be a greater tragedy if she has come too late. What is the highest number of girls Harlowe House will accommodate?"

"Thirty-two," answered Grace.

"Then let us hope that Mary Reynolds is not unlucky thirty-three. The sooner you go to see Miss Wilder the sooner you'll know her fate. Now I'm going on a tour of exploration and

noisy admiration. I'm sure I haven't ohs and ahs enough to fully express my feeling of elevated pleasure at so much magnificence. And to thing that I, ordinary, every-day me, should be asked to become co-partner to all this." Emma struck an attitude and launched forth into fresh extravagances over the tastefully furnished suite of rooms.

"Emma, you ridiculous creature, wind up your lecture and get ready for luncheon," commanded Grace affectionately.

"Not until I've seen the last saw," returned Emma firmly.

For the next ten minutes she prowled and peered, examined and admired, to her heart's content. "Now I've seen everything," she averred, at last, with calm satisfaction, "and I'm twice as hungry as I was. But I can't leave off thinking what a lucky person Emma Dean is to have all this grandeur and Grace Harlowe thrown in."

"And I can't help thinking what a lucky person Grace Harlowe is to have Emma Dean."

"Then we're a mutual admiration society," finished Emma, "and there's no telling where we'll leave off."

"If I didn't have to go on to Overton Hall I wouldn't wear a hat," sighed Grace, half an hour later, reaching reluctantly for her hat.

She and Emma had bathed their faces, rearranged their hair, and put on fresh lingerie blouses with their tailored suits. "Are you ready, Emma? I wonder if Miss Reynolds is. I'll stop and see."

Grace knocked lightly on the newcomer's door. It was opened immediately.

"Are you ready, Miss Reynolds?" she asked, her alert eyes noting that the offending peplum had been tucked inside the black skirt, and that Mary Reynolds with her hat off was a vast improvement on Mary Reynolds with her hat on. She also observed that the girl's hair, though drawn uncompromisingly back from her forehead, showed a decided tendency to curl. With her usual impulsiveness she exclaimed, "Oh, you have naturally curly hair, haven't you? It's such a pretty shade of brown. Do let me do it for you. It's a pity not to make the most of it."

The girl regarded her with grave surprise. "Are you making fun of me?" she asked seriously.

" 'Making fun of you,' " repeated Grace. "I should say not. I think you have beautiful hair. Why, what is it, Miss Reynolds?" For, with a queer, choking cry, the odd little stranger threw herself face downward on the bed and sobbed disconsolately.

Grace stood silent, watching the sob-wracked

figure with puzzled, sympathetic eyes. Emma appeared in the doorway, her eyebrows elevated in astonishment. Grace motioned for her to come in. The girl on the bed wept on, while the two young women waited patiently for her sobs to cease.

Suddenly she sat up with a jerk, and dashed her hand across her eyes. "I'm sorry—I—was so—so—silly," she faltered, "but I couldn't help it. No one ever told me that I was anything but plain and ugly before."

"You poor little thing," sympathized Emma.

Grace sat down on the bed beside Mary and put her arm across the thin shoulders. "Cheer up," she said brightly. "I am sure you are going to be happy at Overton. You feel blue just now because you are tired and hungry. Let me fix your hair and we'll hurry to Vinton's as fast as ever we can. I'm simply starved."

Mary Reynolds obediently sat on the chair Grace placed for her and the hair dressing began. Grace and Emma both exclaimed in admiration as Grace unbraided the soft-golden brown hair, which, once free, broke into waves and curls.

"Did you ever see a prettier head of hair?" exclaimed Emma.

"I think it would look best combed low over her forehead, don't you?" asked Grace.

Emma nodded her approval as Grace, with deft fingers, arranged the thick curly locks in a strictly smart fashion which completely changed Mary Reynolds' forlorn appearance.

"Now look in the glass," directed Grace, when she had finished.

Mary gazed earnestly at her new self. "It can't be me," she said with a pardonable disregard of English.

"But it is," Grace assured her. "You must learn to do your hair like that and wear it so. Now let me put a tiny bit of powder on your face to scare away the tear stains and we'll be off."

The obnoxious helmetlike hat did not seem so unbecoming, now that Mary's curls peeped from under it, and Grace felt a certain degree of satisfaction in her efforts to make the new girl at least presentable. She decided that once her large brown eyes had lost their scared, anxious expression and her thin face had grown plump, Mary would be really pretty.

During luncheon at Vinton's Grace quietly studied her charge. There was something about Mary that reminded one of Ruth Denton, she decided. She and Emma made every effort to put the prospective freshman at her ease. By common consent they refrained from asking any questions likely to produce another

flood of tears. As for Mary herself, although visibly embarrassed at the ultra-smartness of Vinton's, the attention of the waiter, and the puzzling array of knives, forks and spoons, she managed, by watching Grace and Emma, to acquit herself with credit. Thanks to Emma's never-failing flow of humorous remarks the luncheon proved to be a merry meal and before it ended the forlorn girl looked almost happy.

"I'll see you later," said Grace, as they paused for a moment in front of Vinton's. "Emma, I leave Miss Reynolds in your care."

"I accept the responsibility," declared Emma, flourishing her parasol in fantastic salute. "I'm going to march her home and put her to bed."

"While I go on to Overton Hall to learn her fate," smiled Grace. "Good-bye. You may expect me when you see me."

Grace swung across the campus toward Overton Hall at her usual brisk pace. A few moments more and she would be fairly launched in her new undertaking. She had no desire to run out to meet the future, yet she could not refrain from wondering what her first year on the campus would bring her. So far it had brought her Mary Reynolds, but somewhere in the world there were thirty-one other girls whose

faces were set toward Overton and Harlowe House.

A peculiar wave of dismay swept over Grace at the thought of actually being responsible for the welfare of so many persons. The old saying concerning the rushing in of fools where angels walk warily came involuntarily to her mind. Then she laughed and squaring her capable shoulders murmured half aloud, "I'm neither a fool nor an angel. I'm just Grace Harlowe, a 'mere ordinary human being,' as Hippy would put it. I'm not going to be so silly as to expect to get along with a whole houseful of girls without some friction. Like the gardens Anne and I planted away back in our freshman year, there are sure to be a few weeds among the flowers."

CHAPTER IX

MARY REYNOLDS MAKES A NEW FRIEND

"TWENTY-NINE, thirty, thirty-one and Mary Reynolds makes thirty-two. Isn't it fortunate that there was a place all ready for her?" Grace Harlowe looked eagerly up from the list of names which she had been intently scanning.

"Very fortunate," smiled Miss Wilder. "I am quite curious to see your protégé, Miss Harlowe."

Miss Wilder, the dean of Overton College, had been genuinely glad to welcome Grace Harlowe back to the college fold. During Grace's four years as a student at Overton she had greatly endeared herself to the dignified, but kindly, dean, who had watched her pass from honor to honor with the same sympathetic interest which Miss Thompson, the principal of Oakdale High School had ever exhibited in Grace's progress.

It was now almost four o'clock in the afternoon. Grace had spent a busy two hours in Miss Wilder's office going over the applications for admittance to Harlowe House and discussing ways and means with her superior.

"Do you know, Miss Wilder, that one of the very nicest things about you is your interest in one's friends and plans?" Grace regarded the older woman with sparkling eyes. "Away back in my freshman days I can remember that I never came to you with anything, but that you were interested and sympathetic."

"My dear child!" Miss Wilder put up a protesting hand.

"It's perfectly true," persisted Grace staunchly. "I am sure I could never have

planned everything so beautifully for Harlowe House if you hadn't helped me."

"But I had such a wonderful source of inspiration," reminded Miss Wilder, turning the tide of approbation in Grace's direction.

"I wish I could agree with you," laughed Grace, her color rising. Then her face grew earnest. "It would make me very happy if I thought that, as the head of Harlowe House, I could inspire my girls to love Overton as deeply and truly as I do. I don't intend to preach to them or to moralize, but I do wish them to gain real college spirit. If they strive to cultivate that, it will mean more to them than all the talks and lectures one could give them. Don't you think so?"

"I do, indeed," agreed Miss Wilder warmly.

"Of course," went on Grace thoughtfully, "there is the possibility that some of these girls may fail in their entrance examinations. Undoubtedly they will have to take them, for no girl who applies for admission to Harlowe House will have come from a preparatory school. Naturally, they will all be high school graduates. Some of them will have scholarships and some will not. It is going to be more or less of a struggle for those who have none to earn their college fees—that is, if they haven't saved the money for them beforehand.

I am reasonably certain that poor little Mary Reynolds hasn't a penny of her own, other than the ten dollars she has saved. But if she passes her examinations she can borrow the money for her college fees from Semper Fidelis. Then, too, there is the subject of rules and regulations to be considered."

"A very important subject," interposed Miss Wilder. "The success of Harlowe House will depend upon its rules and their absolute enforcement."

"Don't you think it would be a nice idea to draw up a little constitution and by-laws as they do in clubs. It would not cost very much to have a certain number of copies of them printed, and a copy placed in each girl's room. Oh, Miss Wilder, wouldn't it be splendid if we could form the girls of Harlowe House into a social club. It would bring them in touch with one another, teach them to be self-governing, and do an endless amount of good." Grace finished with sudden inspiration.

For a moment Miss Wilder did not answer. She was evidently turning the matter over in her own mind. "It is rather an unusual idea," she said slowly, "but I should not be surprised to see it work out well. Among a number of young women who, aside from the advantages Harlowe House offers them, are practically de-

pendent upon their own resources you are sure to find a variety of dispositions, some of them a little warped from their struggle with poverty. I should say that they could be reached and understood better by becoming members of this club, which you propose, than by any other method. Yes, decidedly, it is a good plan."

Grace remained with the dean until after five o'clock talking earnestly of her new work. "Oh, dear, I can scarcely wait for the next two weeks to pass I'm so anxious to begin," she sighed, as she gathered together her gloves, handkerchief and parasol and rose to go. "Miss Dean will come to see you to-morrow morning, Miss Wilder. I'll send Miss Reynolds with her."

The sun was well advanced on his daily pilgrimage down the western sky, and Grace's usually rapid steps lagged as she crossed the dear familiar campus. Her eyes strayed lovingly from the green velvety carpeting under her feet to the red and yellow pennants of autumn which the trees were flaunting so bravely. It was hard to say at which season of the year Overton campus was most beautiful. To Grace it was like some familiar friend who was constantly surprising her with new and endearing virtues.

She gazed across the wide stretch of green toward Morton House. Two girlish figures were seated on the steps apparently deep in their own interests. A little farther on she met three sophomores, who, recognizing her, bowed to her in smiling admiration. Grace stopped and held out her hand with the frank cordiality which characterized her. After a pleasant exchange of greetings they passed on greatly elated over the fact that "that clever Miss Harlowe, who was the most popular girl at Overton last year," had remembered them.

"We're beginning to gather home," she murmured softly. She was passing Holland House now, and it brought back delightful memories of Mabel Ashe. Her glance rested wistfully on the front door. She half expected to see it open and to see coming toward her the lithe, graceful figure of the girl whose dainty hands had been the first to grasp hers in friendly welcome, when, as an untried freshman, she had first set foot in the land of Overton so long ago. "Mabel," she breathed, "dear, dear girl! If ever I come to mean half as much to lonely freshmen as you meant to me, I shall feel that I have succeeded gloriously."

Wrapped in recollections of the past, which she realized were bound to haunt her at every

turn until time and work had banished her sense of loss, Grace did not hear the light footsteps of the tall young woman who bore noiselessly down upon her like an avenging fate. Suddenly Grace felt two soft, cool hands close over her eyes.

"Oh!" she gasped. Then she laughed. "I know it's some one I'm anxious to see. Is it Kathleen?"

The hands did not relax their pressure.

"Is it Laura Atkins?" guessed Grace again.

The pressure tightened a little.

"I know now," cried Grace. "Why didn't I guess you first of all? It's Patience."

The hands fell away from her eyes. Grace wheeled about into a pair of encircling arms. A very tall, fair-haired young woman stood looking down on her with a face full of lively affection. "I wonder if you are as glad to see me as I am to see you, Grace," was her first speech.

"Every bit as glad," responded Grace with emphasis. "Emma and I have been looking forward to your coming every day since we came."

"Emma?" interrogated Patience. "Do you mean to tell me that Emma Dean is here?"

"Yes," replied Grace happily. "She's come back to be Miss Duncan's assistant. Isn't that splendid?"

"I've been mourning Emma among the rest of the bright departed spirits," smiled Patience, "and thinking of how dull Wayne Hall will be this year without her. Emma is Emma, you know, and cannot be duplicated, imitated nor replaced. I suppose, as a teacher, she'll live in one of the faculty houses, instead of Wayne Hall."

"She is going to have part of my suite at Harlowe House," said Grace. "But, before I say another word, where are you going?"

"To Overton Hall to see Miss Wilder."

"Can't you put off going until to-morrow morning?" asked Grace.

"Yes, if you and Emma will go with me to the six-thirty train to meet Kathleen and then to dinner at Vinton's afterward."

"Will we?" cried Grace. "I should say—I'm afraid we can't, Patience." Her jubilant tone changed to one of disappointment. "I forgot all about Mary Reynolds."

"Who is Mary Reynolds and what did I ever do to her that causes her to conspire to cheat me of the society of my friends?" inquired Patience humorously.

"Not a single thing," assured Grace brightening again. "She's the thirty-second applicant for admission to Harlowe House, but she's living there as my guest for a few days until

she finds out whether she 'belongs.' Suppose you walk over there with me. I wish you to see the house before the tenants arrive. I'll tell you the strange story of Mary Reynolds on the way over. Emma's at home, so you can see her, too."

"All right, I'll go, provided you and your entire family, including Mary Reynolds, escort me to the train to meet Kathleen."

"Here's my hand on it," promised Grace.

Patience caught it in both of hers. "It's good to be here, Grace," she said earnestly.

"It's good to have you here, Patience," returned Grace, in the same earnest tone.

Patience was met at the door by Emma, who had seen their approach from the living-room window, and who now pounced upon Patience and joyfully escorted her into the living-room.

"The plot thickens," declaimed Emma as the three paused in the middle of the room. "Hurrah for the old guard! Like Macbeth's immortal witches, I'll perform my antic round, just to show how jubilant I feel." She executed a few fantastic steps about Patience, then paused beside her, one hand on her shoulder. "Where did you acquire Patience, Grace?"

"I acquired this particular kind of Patience on the campus just a few moments ago. I have never actually acquired the other kind."

"You're not the only one," murmured Emma significantly.

"Where is our freshman-to-be?"

"In her room and fast asleep, I suppose. Although she wouldn't admit it, I know she was completely tired out. I could see that," she added slyly.

Patience and Grace smiled in quick recognition of J. Elfreda Briggs' pet phrase.

"How I wish 'I could see' dear old J. Elfreda. Wouldn't it be glorious if she were suddenly to appear in the flesh," sighed Emma.

"She was here with Mrs. Gray and I in August, Patience." Grace went on to relate the details of Elfreda's visit. "Emma has heard all this before. Still, you don't mind hearing it again, do you, Emma?"

"I could listen to it forever, and then ask for a repetition," asserted Emma with gallant glibness.

"I won't be so malicious as to take you at your word," returned Grace. "Will you tell Patience all the news while I run upstairs to see Miss Reynolds?"

"I will," nodded Emma, "and tell it truthfully and without embellishments. I am not a yellow journal. I am a reliable purveyor of facts and nothing but facts." She pounded on

the library table with her clenched fist to emphasize her words.

"I believe you," assured Patience with mock solemnity, "and salute you as a disciple of truth."

Leaving her friends to exchange confidences, Grace ran lightly up the stairs and knocked on Mary Reynolds' door. Receiving no answer, she knocked again.

"She must be asleep," thought Grace. Then she turned the knob and entered the room. Surely enough the tired stranger lay on her couch bed, tranquil and slumber-wrapped. Sleep had smoothed away the lines of care and, in repose, her face looked soft and childish.

"Miss Reynolds."

The girl sat up with a little, startled cry. "Oh," she breathed, in relief. "I was so frightened. I forgot where I was."

"Miss Dean, a friend of ours and I are going to the station to meet another friend. We wish you to go with us," invited Grace. "That is, unless you prefer to stay here. You will be all alone in the house."

An expression of alarm showed itself in the girl's eyes. "I'd rather go with you, if you are sure I won't be in the way."

"Not in the least. We shall start in a few moments." With a cheerful smile that elicited

a faint, answering one from the other girl, Grace left the room. She was back in an instant with something blue thrown over her arm. "Here is a little coat I took out of my trunk especially for you. It is cool enough for a coat to-night. This won't be too long for you. It's only three-quarter length on me."

"I—I—" stammered Mary, but Grace was gone.

Mary could not help thrilling a little with pure pleasure at sight of herself in the pretty blue serge coat. "I look just like them," she murmured. "I'm so glad I came. I won't go back either, and no one shall make me." She smoothed and patted her curly hair, then putting on her shabby hat went slowly down stairs.

Her momentary awe of Patience vanished when she discovered that, in spite of her dignified bearing, this tall, fair young woman was as full of fun as the droll Emma Dean.

The quartette started for the station with Patience and Emma in the lead. Grace walked with Mary, talking brightly of Overton to her absorbed listener. She had just begun to tell Mary of Kathleen West, her clever work as a newspaper woman and of how her play had won the honor pin, when they arrived at the station.

"Wait here while I see if the train is on time," directed Grace.

The three young women strolled slowly along the platform, pausing at one end of it.

"The train's on time," called Grace as she came out of the station and approached them. "It's due in four minutes. Listen! Didn't you hear it whistle?"

A minute later it was visible around the bend and bearing down on the station with a great puffing and whistling.

"I see her," announced Emma. "She's getting off at the upper end of the train."

An alert little figure in a gray coat suit came swinging down the platform, a suit case in each hand, her keen, dark eyes scanning every face. Suddenly she caught sight of her friends. Dropping her luggage she ran forward, both hands extended. Grace caught them in hers. The two embraced, then Grace passed Kathleen on to Patience.

"And to think that Emma Dean is to be one of us!" exclaimed Kathleen. "Emma, the one sure and certain cure for the blues. I didn't half appreciate you last year." A swift flush rose to her cheeks. "I didn't appreciate any one. I missed knowing Overton's best, but I'm so thankful that part of that best has come back again, so that I can really show how

much I care," she finished, her eyes very bright.

The little company lingered on the platform, for there was so much to be said that they were loath to move on. So absorbed were they in their own affairs they did not observe that a tall, raw-boned, roughly dressed man, with a gaunt, disagreeable face had been stealthily edging nearer the group until within a few feet of them. All at once a long bony hand was thrust into their midst. The hand landed on the shoulder of Mary Reynolds, swinging her almost off her feet. She did not scream, but her face grew white and her eyes horror-stricken. Then she wrenched desperately to free herself from the cruel clutch, gasping, "Let—me—alone. I—won't—go back—with—you."

"Oh, ye won't, won't ye," growled the hateful intruder. "We'll see if ye won't. Get a move on." He half dragged, half shoved the now sobbing Mary along the platform.

For an instant no one of the astonished girls moved or protested. Then a small, lithe figure flung itself in front of the brutal fellow, barring his progress. "Take your hands off that girl," commanded a tense, authoritative voice.

As if in recognition of its authority the man's cruel hold on Mary's slender shoulder relaxed.

Kathleen West's black eyes were blazing. With a swift forward movement she threw her arm protectingly across Mary's shoulder and drew her close. "Now," she said, her whole body tense with suppressed anger, "touch her if you dare."

"Ye better git out and mind yer own business or ye'll wish ye had," threatened the man, his first feeling of fear vanishing. "Yer nothin' but a lot o' silly girls. You git along," he ordered, fixing his scowling eyes on Mary.

"This little girl is going to stay with us. It is you that had better move on. If you aren't out of sight within the next three minutes I'll have you arrested for annoying us, and it won't be wise for you to come back again either."

Kathleen's face, as she stood calmly eyeing her disagreeable adversary, was like a study in stone. She looked as inexorable and relentless as Fate itself, and the bully understood dimly that here was a force with which he could not reckon.

"I'm a goin'," he mumbled sullenly, "but I'm a goin' to git the law on *her,*" he pointed to Mary, "and make her git back where she belongs."

By this time several persons had hurried to the scene of the encounter. Kathleen's sole reply to the threat was a contemptuous shrug

of her shoulders. "Come on, girls," she said so nonchalantly that the curious ones dropped disappointedly away. Not more than four minutes had elapsed from the time the uncouth stranger had appeared until he slunk off. Emma, Grace and Patience found their voices almost simultaneously.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Emma.

"I was literally amazed to dumbness," declared Patience.

"So was I for a minute, but Kathleen was so completely sure of herself that I knew it was better to be silent. She disposed of that obstreperous individual most summarily. Who is he, Miss Reynolds?" Grace turned grave eyes upon Mary. "We shall have to know all about him if we are to help you."

They were now walking slowly up the street.

"He's—my—uncle," faltered the girl. "Mother died last summer just after I finished high school, and I had no place to go. He wanted me to go out in the country and live on his farm. He said I could go to college, but after I went to the farm he and his wife made me do all the work, and laughed when I spoke of going to college. A nice girl I knew had told me about Overton and Harlowe House. She was in the town of Overton last commencement and heard about it. I told them I would go in

spite of them, so they locked me in my room, but I climbed out the window and into a big tree, one of its branches was quite near the window, and then slid to the ground."

"How old are you, Miss Reynolds?" asked Kathleen West with apparent irrelevance.

"I was eighteen last week."

"Then you needn't worry about your uncle. You are of age and can do as you please."

"Do you mean that he can't make me leave here?" Mary Reynolds' eyes were wide with surprise and sudden hope.

"Of course he can't," reassured Kathleen. "Girls, I'm going to adopt Mary Reynolds as my especial charge and help her fight her battles in the Land of College. Mary will you let me adopt you?"

Mary regarded Kathleen with shy admiration. She thought her the most wonderful person she had ever known. She was deeply grateful to Grace and her two friends for their kindness, but Kathleen's swift, efficient action on her behalf had completely won her heart. "I'd be the happiest girl in the world," she said solemnly.

The next morning Grace went frankly to Miss Wilder with the tragic story of Mary's struggle to obtain an education and the attempt her

miserly uncle had made to force her to return to the farm.

"We shall be obliged to look into the matter," declared the dean. "Send Miss Reynolds to me as soon as possible. I must be very sure that she is all she represents herself to be. I should not care to have a repetition of the station scene later, on the campus, for instance. It would hardly add to the dignity of Overton."

"I'll bring her to your office to-morrow morning," said Grace, "then you can form your own opinion of her."

Mary Reynolds' wistful face was the last touch needed to completely enlist Miss Wilder's sympathy in her behalf. On the strength of the straightforward story which she repeated to the dean, she was allowed to proceed with her examinations. Meantime Miss Wilder wrote to the authorities of the little town near which Mary's uncle's farm was situated. They conducted a prompt investigation and by the time the hitherto friendless girl had passed triumphantly through the ordeal of examinations the faintest trace of objection to her becoming a student at Overton had been removed.

CHAPTER X

THE THIRTY-THIRD GIRL

"I AM sorry," said Grace gently, "but I am afraid it will be impossible for me to do anything for your sister this year. Harlowe House will hold, comfortably, thirty-two girls and no more. It isn't so much a matter of meals. They could, perhaps, be arranged, but I haven't a room for your sister. Could she afford to rent a room in town and come here for her meals?" This was an afterthought on Grace's part, born of the desire to clear away the cruel shadow of disappointment that clouded the pale face of the woman who sat opposite her in her little office.

"I—am—afraid not," faltered the pale, thin woman, her tired eyes filling with an expression of resignation. "I thought I might be able to manage her college fees, if her living expenses could be arranged. We were so sorry that she did not win a scholarship. You are quite sure that there is no chance for her here?" she asked pleadingly, for the fourth time. "She has set her heart on coming to Overton. College means so much to a girl, and Evelyn is so clever. It seems a pity that

she must stop with only a high school education."

Grace knitted her brows in earnest thought, while the pleading voice talked on. She felt an overpowering sympathy, not for the sister who wished to come to Overton, but for the sister who was now advocating her cause. And even as she thought the way in which one more girl might partake of the benefits of Harlowe House came to her. It was a way of sacrifice; she was not even sure that it could be done. Something in the expression of her face, however, seemed to inspire the woman opposite her with new hope. She leaned forward, with the eager question: "Am I wrong or does your face tell me that there is a chance for Evelyn?" For the first time she mentioned her sister's name.

" 'Evelyn,' " repeated Grace half musingly. "What a pretty name. How old is your sister, Miss Ward?"

"She was eighteen last August."

"I can make you no definite promise yet," returned Grace slowly. "Could you come to see me this afternoon at four o'clock? I shall know then whether the plan I have in mind can be carried out."

"I will come," promised the woman eagerly, her eyes kindling with happy light. "I thank

you for your kindness." Her voice trembled with gratitude. She rose to go, looking as though she would like to say more but could not find words in which to express herself.

"You are quite welcome. I will try very hard to place her," was Grace's parting assurance.

After the woman, who had introduced herself as Ida Ward, had gone, Grace went slowly upstairs and into her pretty sitting-room. She looked long and fixedly at each attractive appointment, then she walked on into the bedroom, which she and Emma shared, and surveyed it with the same searching gaze. "I can't do it unless Emma is willing," she murmured. "I dislike asking her after inviting her to share my suite. Still, we've always been frank with each other. I'll tell her the exact circumstances as soon as she comes home to luncheon, and let her decide what we had better do." Having determined upon her course of action Grace went downstairs again and was soon deep in the laying-out of next week's menu for Harlowe House, a task in which she had been engaged when Miss Ida Ward was announced.

It was now two weeks since Overton College had opened. The thirty-two applicants for places in Harlowe House had, without exception, passed through the trying ordeal of their entrance examinations with varying degrees of

success, but not one had actually failed. They had come into the house, which was their Open Sesame to college, in twos and threes. Few of them were pretty, but even the plainest of their faces bore the unmistakable stamp of intelligence that marks the scholar. The half-brooding, anxious look in young eyes and the womanly dignity, prematurely gained through hand to hand conflict with poverty, were certain indications that the girls of Harlowe House were there for earnest work and not for play.

And now a thirty-third girl was knocking at the gate for admittance to the Land of College. Grace wondered vaguely why Evelyn Ward had not come to plead her own cause. The words of Ida Ward, "I thought I might be able to manage her college fees," returned to her with disquieting force. Then she made a little impatient gesture. "Grace Harlowe, what is the matter with you? You are judging poor Evelyn Ward without giving her an opportunity to defend herself. You know nothing whatever of the Wards' affairs. There may be a dozen good reasons for Miss Ward's coming here in her sister's behalf. Don't be so suspicious. Wait until you see Evelyn Ward before you judge her."

Although Grace did not realize it she was al-

ready thinking of Evelyn Ward as a member of Harlowe House. There was no fear of refusal on Emma's part. Long acquaintance with her good-natured, easy-going classmate had taught her that Emma was equal to, if not more than a match for, almost any emergenccy.

"Emma would take her belongings and camp out in the hall if I asked her to," smiled Grace to herself as she went slowly downstairs to her office and, seating herself at her desk, took up the writing on which she had been engaged when her caller was announced.

She was still hard at work when the girls began to come in for luncheon, one after another, and at last she heard Emma's delightful drawl as she exchanged pleasantries with one of the freshmen who had opened the door for her.

"Oh, Emma," she called, stepping to the door of her office, "will you come in here, please? I need you."

By the time Grace had finished speaking Emma was standing in the doorway, peering owlishly at her. "Most Gracious Grace," she salaamed, "what is your majesty's magnificent pleasure with your worthless and most despicable dog of a servant?"

"I don't know any such person," laughed Grace. Then, her face sobering, she plunged into the middle of things with, "What would

you say, Emma, if I were to give half of our quarters to some one else?"

"I'd say that I was lucky to have half of the half that's left," was Emma's prompt retort.

"You're a dear!" cried Grace impulsively. "I knew you were true blue. Still, I must tell you all about certain things before you decide. It's just this way, Emma." Grace began with Miss Ward's call and recounted to Emma all that had passed between herself and the stranger. Emma listened without comment until Grace had finished with, "Now tell me what you think, Emma."

"I think it is positively noble in you to be willing to give up one of your rooms," emphasized Emma. "As far as I am concerned I'm not a 'chooser.' I'm here because of that same saving grace—it's as much a part of you as your name—which is reaching out now to put one more girl in Overton. What can any strictly honorable, four-cornered person say except, 'I'm with you,' and here's my hand in seal and token of it."

"Thank you, Emma," Grace's quiet words and warm handclasp were eloquent with appreciation of her friend's unselfish viewpoint. "Suppose we run upstairs for a moment before luncheon to look around and decide which of the

two rooms we can best do without. And, O, Emma, we'll have room for a thirty-fourth girl, if she happens along. I never thought of that. In the face of all that a college education will mean to this girl our personal comfort rather pales into insignificance."

"Who are we that we should revel in the fleshpots of Overton while the stranger knocks at our gates?" supplemented Emma. "Now which is it to be? Shall we say, 'good-bye beloved sitting-room, ne'er shall we behold thy like again,' or shall we bid fond adieu to the bedroom? I ask but one concession, let us reserve our nice private bathroom. It has a value above rubies."

"Of course we'll keep our bathroom. There are three others in the house of which these new girls can have the use. As long as the bathroom opens into both rooms, I shall bolt the door leading into the room we give Miss Ward. That may appear a trifle inhospitable on the surface, but I wish to keep what is left of our apartment as secluded as possible," ended Grace, opening the door into the sitting-room. "Now, which shall it be, Emma?"

Emma prowled contemplatively about the suite, her hands in her coat pockets, her glasses pushed far over her nose. Finally she paused before Grace. Settling her glasses at their

proper angle she said earnestly, "I don't wish to seem selfish, Grace, but really I think you are entitled to the sitting-room. It's larger and lighter. It's more attractive in every way. I am not thinking of myself in this matter, I am thinking of you. You are the brains and brawn of Harlowe House, therefore you must be made comfortable if you are to do good work here. The other room is easily large enough to accommodate two girls. It is larger than the rooms we occupied at Wayne Hall."

"I know it." Grace strolled reflectively through the open bathroom door and on into the bedroom. When she returned, she had decided. "You are right, Emma. I don't believe it would be selfish to keep this room. Now how shall we furnish it?"

"Don't ask me to decide that," protested Emma. "I feel as though I ought to pack my belongings and go to one of the faculty houses, Grace. It isn't fair to you for me to stay here and be a cumberer of your room."

"Emma Dean, if you do!" Grace caught Emma by the shoulders and proceeded to shake her.

"Wait! Stop!" implored Emma. "My glasses! And lenses cost money!"

"Will you stay?" demanded a relentless voice. The shaking continued, but gently.

"I will. That is, I'll have to, or pay the oculist."

Grace's hands fell from Emma's shoulders.

"I didn't want to pack and go," confessed Emma, "but I was trying to be as fair to you as you are to every one else."

"It wouldn't be one bit fair in you to leave me. You promised to see me through, you know," reproached Grace.

"So I did, and so I will," declared Emma, "I take back all I said. From now on I am as much of a fixture here as the kitchen range or the window seat."

Grace laughed at Emma's absurd declaration. "I couldn't let you go, Emma. You are too good a comrade. Now let me think. I'll have my dressing table brought in here, but, in order to make a combination sitting and sleeping room of this, we will have to buy a couch bed. The davenport there is a bed too. We'll put it across that corner, and have the couch against that wall. We'll have to keep the dressing table. We can't avoid that. I don't know what to do with my bed. It is three-quarter size. I selected it purposely, so that I'd have room for two of the girls at a time if they dropped in unexpectedly. I don't like to sell it. It matches the set."

"Why not leave it in the other room," sug-

gested Emma. "If girl number thirty-four never materializes then Miss Evelyn Ward can occupy the whole bed, if she chooses."

"But suppose we do admit another girl?"

"Sufficient unto the day, etc.," shrugged Emma. "When she appears, then let the committee take action."

"I'll buy a smaller dressing table to match the bed, if I can, and a chiffonier. I can't quite give mine up to this newcomer. There goes the luncheon bell. I must hurry downstairs to the kitchen to see if everything is all right."

Grace hastened down the stairs, with her friend at her heels. Emma went directly to the dining-room and took her place at the table laid for two at the lower end of the room. This table belonged exclusively to her and Grace. The dining-room at Harlowe House had been furnished after the fashion of a pretty little tea shop at which Grace had often lunched in New York. The walls were done in white with a faint blue and silver stripe. The ceiling was white with a decoration of deep blue corn flowers. The floor was covered with a thread and thrum rug in blue and white, and instead of two long tables there were several small ones which seated from four to six persons. In the middle of each table was a vase of flowers, and the effect of the whole room was dainty and

homelike. Grace had spent much thought on the dining-room. The buffet, serving tables, tables and chairs were white, and the silver, linen and various other appointments had been carefully chosen.

"I wish the girls to feel that this room is a place where they can eat and be merry. It is in the dining-room that they will first become acquainted with one another," Grace had said to Mrs. Gray while they were choosing the dining-room furniture. "I like the idea of having the small tables. The girls can talk quietly and confidentially, if they choose. Besides it looks so cosy and informal."

As Grace ate her luncheon that day her eyes wandered to the various tables. She was speculating as to where she would seat Evelyn Ward. Already she thought of her as one of her girls.

At precisely four o'clock the door bell rang and the maid ushered Ida Ward into the living-room. Her large eyes were wide with anxiety and suspense as she sat nervously on the edge of her chair, trying to appear composed. She tried to answer Grace's reassuring smile, but her anxious eyes belied her wanly-smiling lips.

"I have good news for you, Miss Ward," said Grace brightly. "I have made room for your sister. When may I expect her?"

Ida Ward's lips moved, but she made no sound. Then, to Grace's consternation, she covered her face with her black-gloved hands and began to cry quietly. For an instant Grace sat in embarrassed silence. She hardly knew what consolation to offer this poor, pale woman who looked as though she carried the burdens of the world upon her slender shoulders. Before she could think of anything to say, Miss Ward suddenly raised her head, wiped her eyes and said quietly, "Forgive me for crying. I—am a little tired. I was rather overcome by the good news."

"Suppose we have tea in the living room," was Grace's kindly suggestion. "What time does your train leave? By the way, I don't think I know where you live."

"We live in Burton, a little town about two hundred miles from here, with a population of six thousand people. I am a dressmaker. There are only Evelyn and I, and I am fifteen years older than she. Mother died when she was born. Father died only a year later and I have taken care of her all her life. She is very beautiful. One of the prettiest girls I have ever seen, and so clever." The plain face lighted as she described Evelyn.

"How she loves her pretty sister," thought Grace.

Over the tea, dainty sandwiches and cakes, Ida Ward became quite cheerful. When half an hour later she rose to take her leave, she looked really happy. "How can I thank you for what you have done for Evelyn?" she asked tremulously, her lips quivering. "My little sister will be so glad. I am sure she can't help being happy in this beautiful house."

"Send her to us as soon as you can," advised Grace. "College has been open for over three weeks and she will have quite an amount of work to make up. This is Monday. May I expect her on Thursday?"

"Yes, she can leave Burton early Thursday morning. There is a train which reaches here at two o'clock in the afternoon."

"Very well. I will send some one to meet her," promised Grace.

During the next two days Grace and Emma accomplished their moving so quietly that no one in the house knew of the new member the morrow was to bring. When everything had been put in place Emma declared cheerily that they would never miss the other room.

At the last moment Grace decided to go in person to the train to meet Evelyn. The memory of Ida Ward's white patient face haunted her. For her sake her beloved sister should be cordially welcomed. Grace felt the deepest

respect and sympathy for the older sister.

"Miss Ward said her sister was very pretty," reflected Grace, then she looked a trifle dismayed. She had received absolutely no other description of the girl she was to meet. She did not know whether Evelyn Ward was short or tall, stout or thin, dark or fair. "I'll simply have to use my eyes and guess," was her mental comment, as she walked briskly along the station platform just as the train whizzed down the track. Her alert eyes scanned the nearest car steps where the porter was helping a crotchety old man to the platform. Behind him came a stout middle-aged woman and two children. Grace scanned the next set of steps. Then, far up the platform she saw a tall, slender, blue-clad figure walking toward her at a leisurely pace. The girl carried a small handbag and a suit case. When she came directly opposite Grace she paused, then, after a deliberate survey, walked forward with outstretched hand. "Aren't you Miss Harlowe?" she asked sweetly. "If you are, I am Evelyn Ward."

CHAPTER XI

EVELYN WARD, FRESHMAN

GRACE found herself looking into one of the most perfect faces she had ever seen. Evelyn Ward was a blonde of the purest type. Her thick golden hair lay in shining waves under her small, smart blue hat. Her eyes were deeply, darkly blue with purple depths, while her skin had the sheen and texture of pale pink rose leaves. Her small, straight nose, softly-curved red mouth and delicately-arched dark eyebrows added to the tender beauty of her face. To Grace she came as a revelation, and, so far as she could remember, she had never seen any other blonde girl who approached this one in loveliness.

"How do you do, Miss Ward? I am glad to know you," she said, offering her hand. She noticed that the slender hand that Evelyn put forth to meet hers was very soft and white. It had evidently done no hard work and was in sharp contrast to the rough, work-worn hands of her sister.

"I'm sure I am pleased to know you, Miss Harlowe, and very thankful to you for arranging for my coming to Overton. I would have

cried my eyes out with disappointment if Ida had come home with bad news," returned the pretty girl in a plaintive tone which impressed Grace with a curiously uncomfortable feeling that this attractive young woman would have done nothing of the sort. There was that indefinable something about her that contradicted, flatly, the idea of tears.

"Your sister was an eloquent pleader, Miss Ward. I would have made an even greater effort than was necessary to place you, if only to please her. I was greatly impressed with her unselfishness and nobility of character," Grace made reply.

An expression of amusement showed itself on Evelyn Ward's face. "Ida is a perfect old dear," she agreed lightly. "She takes life too seriously, though. She worries over every little thing. Still her very seriousness makes a good impression. She has ever so many friends; a great many more than I." She shrugged her shoulders, as though to convey the fact that the latter state of affairs did not trouble her.

"As your luggage is not heavy, we might walk to Harlowe House," suggested Grace. "This glorious fall weather is ideal for walking. Let me take your suit case."

"With pleasure. It's altogether too heavy

for comfort. Are there no street cars or busses we can take? I like to walk, but not when I have luggage to carry."

"We can take a car or an automobile bus if you like," said Grace courteously, although she experienced a vague sense of annoyance at this newcomer's calmly expressed preference.

"Oh, let's take the automobile, if it isn't too expensive!" exclaimed Evelyn eagerly. "I love to ride in an automobile. Are there any girls at Overton who own cars? If there are I shall certainly cultivate them. I suppose they won't notice me, though, because I am a freshman and a poor one at that," she ended with a pout, her fair face taking on almost sullen lines.

Grace shook her head.

"Being poor doesn't count at Overton," she said, "I know a girl who lived in a bare, cheerless room in an old house in the suburbs of Overton and earned her way by doing mending for the students. She worked in a dressmaker's shop during her summer vacations too, and yet she was the chum of the richest girl in college."

"Why didn't the rich girl help her if she thought so much of her?" inquired Evelyn rather sarcastically.

"Because the girl wouldn't allow her to do

so. She was too independent to accept help. She did not wish to become obligated to any one, not even her dearest friend."

"Foolish girl," was Evelyn's contemptuous comment. "If one can't ask occasional favors of one's friends one might as well have none. I am very sure that I would take the goods the gods provide without murmuring. These extreme standards of ethics and honor are all very pretty in books, but not at all practical in every-day life."

Grace made no reply. She was lost, for the instant, in a maze of disagreeable reflection. She was afraid she now understood only too well why Ida instead of Evelyn Ward had come to see her. In the Ward family the hard tasks had apparently been thrust upon the patient elder sister, while the younger reaped where she had not sown, without a conscientious qualm. And it was for this beautiful, selfish girl that she and Emma had curtailed their comfort. She almost wished she had been firm in her first refusal to consider taking another girl into Harlowe House. Then a vision of Ida Ward's thin face, lighted by two pleading eyes, rose before her. With an inward rebuke for her own grudging attitude, Grace squared her shoulders and resolved to look for only the best in this latest arrival.

It took but a moment to hail an automobile bus which had just run into the station yard, and they were soon on their way to Harlowe House. Grace pointed out to Evelyn the various interesting features of Overton. They impressed the latter but little.

"It must be a sleepy old town," she commented, as they passed through the quiet streets. She did, however, evince some slight interest in Vinton's, remarking lightly that she supposed she would never have money enough to buy a dinner there for herself, let alone ever inviting a guest.

"Do not look at your college life through such pessimistic spectacles," advised Grace. "You will be sure to be unhappy."

Evelyn made a pettish gesture. "You remind me of my sister, Miss Harlowe. She is forever preaching patience and optimism and all the other virtues in which I seem to be lacking."

A bright flush rose to Grace's cheeks at this unparalleled rudeness. She cast a quick, curious glance at Evelyn, whose eyes were for the second fixed upon the campus which they were now nearing, and who appeared to be utterly oblivious of her impertinence.

"This is the campus." Grace decided to overlook the pointed remark. "We are justly

proud of Overton College and the campus."

"It is really beautiful," nodded Evelyn, "but I'm going to tell you a secret. I'm not the least little bit enthusiastic over college. I'd rather go to a dramatic school and study for the stage. It is Ida who insists upon my going to college. Thank goodness, I'm not a dunce. It would be dreadful to be forced into college and then be too stupid to learn anything, wouldn't it?"

"It would indeed," agreed Grace.

"I suppose my stage aspirations shock you, Miss Harlowe," went on Evelyn, "but I can't help saying what I think."

"My dearest woman friend is an actress," returned Grace quietly.

"Oh, is she really?" Evelyn's voice rose high with excitement. "What is her name? Perhaps I've heard of her."

"Anne Pierson."

"I should say I had heard of *her*. She is one of the great stars. She is with Everett Southard, isn't she? I've seen their pictures in the magazines."

"She graduated from Overton last year. We were roommates throughout our four years here. She is from my home town."

"Really and truly?" demanded Evelyn impulsively. "That's the most interesting piece

of news I've heard for a long time. Will you tell me all about her some time, Miss Harlowe?"

"With pleasure," returned Grace. "It can hardly be to-day, however, for here we are at Harlowe House."

"What a darling house!" praised Evelyn as they alighted from the automobile. "I am sure I shall like to live in it."

"I hope that you will be happy here," returned Grace kindly. After all it might be better not to take this self-willed young woman too seriously. She had, at least, the virtue of truthfulness. She was entirely frank in the expression of her opinions. She might have many other redeeming qualities which would quite overbalance the disagreeably self-centered side of her character.

Evelyn gazed about in open approval as they ascended the steps of Harlowe House. As they passed through the hall she peeped into the living room and exclaimed in admiration of its attractive appointments. Her voluble appreciation of her own room pleased Grace, who realized that Evelyn's personality was singularly fascinating and that she could be exceedingly gracious when she chose.

"I will leave you now," said Grace, after a little further conversation. "The dinner bell

rings at six o'clock. If you need anything, or wish to ask any questions, you will find me in my office downstairs. It is rather too late in the day for you to see the registrar. To-morrow morning will be time enough. You are lucky to be exempt from examinations."

Grace had hardly established herself in her office when Emma Dean came breezily in from her work. "Well, Gracie," was her cheery greeting, "has she materialized, and is she as pathetic and persistent as Sister Ida?"

Grace made a little gesture of resignation. "Prepare for the surprise of your college career, Emma."

"Didn't she come?" demanded Emma. "That wouldn't surprise me. People are forever promising to arrive on a certain train and then strolling in several days later with the barefaced announcement that the time table had been mysteriously changed."

"She arrived," stated Grace.

"Then wherein lies the surprise?"

"Emma," said Grace solemnly, "Evelyn Ward is the most beautiful girl I have ever seen, and, if I am not mistaken, one of the most selfish. She is no more like her sister than I am like Dr. Morton, and she is going to require more looking after than any other girl in Harlowe House."

CHAPTER XII

THE HARLOWE HOUSE CLUB

"THERE!" Grace Harlowe laid down her pen and scanned the notice she had just finished writing. "I'll post this now. The girls will see it this morning and again when they come in to luncheon. Then they will be sure to meet me in the living-room before dinner. I hope they will like our plan."

"They ought to like it," replied Emma Dean. "It makes them a self-respecting, self-governing body."

"That is precisely what I wish them to be," responded Grace, in all earnestness. "I believe that being members of Semper Fidelis was of great benefit to us. Oh, Emma, did I tell you that Mr. Redfield's gift to Semper Fidelis is now an endowment? He called to see me on Friday for the express purpose of telling me that he has arranged the matter with Professor Morton. The money is to be known hereafter as the Semper Fidelis endowment. He said he felt certain that we had not handed the society down to this year's classes. He couldn't imagine any other young women in our places. Wasn't that nice in him?"

"Very nice and very true," agreed Emma. "I am of the same mind. The Sempers can never be imitated, passed on to the next class, nor replaced. They are in a class all by themselves."

"The purpose of this new club which I propose to organize will be one of welfare. The girls will do more for themselves as a self-governing body than I can possibly do for them. By the way, I wonder if Miss Ward is up yet. She overslept and missed her first recitation yesterday morning. She came down to the dining-room long after breakfast was over. Susan was rather upset over having to serve an extra breakfast. I was obliged to tell Miss Ward that if it occurred again she would have to abide by the consequences of her own tardiness. I can't impose upon the servants to please a girl who has no thought for any one except herself."

Grace spoke rather bitterly. Her early disappointment in Evelyn Ward had deepened as the time passed.

"I don't hear a sound from her room," commented Emma, who sat before the dressing-table brushing her long hair. With hair brush poised in the air she listened intently. "She is dead to the world."

"Then I'll have to waken her," sighed Grace.

Stepping out into the hall she knocked lightly on Evelyn's door. Receiving no response she knocked again, this time with more force.

"Come in," called a sleepy voice.

Grace turned the knob. Sure enough, Evelyn lay comfortably back on her pillow, her wonderful golden hair falling in long, loose waves about her. Her beauty now made little impression upon Grace, who knew only too well the tantalizing, troublesome spirit that lay behind it. "It is almost eight o'clock, Miss Ward. Remember, breakfast is over at nine."

"I know it," responded Evelyn with maddening sweetness. She eyed Grace speculatively, but made no effort to rise.

Without further words Grace closed the door. She did not wish to betray her annoyance. She had experienced a wild desire to march over to the bed and drag the complacent freshman forth from it by the shoulders.

When Evelyn descended to the dining-room she found that most of the girls had eaten breakfast and gone off to chapel. Happening to recall that she had not attended the morning services for a week, and with visions of her unsigned chapel card staring her in the face, she ate a hurried breakfast and was about to depart when her eyes happened to rest upon the bulletin board in the hall around which were

gathered several girls. Pausing, Evelyn read Grace's notice. It asked the members of Harlowe House to be in the living room at five o'clock that afternoon for the discussion of a most important subject.

"I wonder what it is," said Nettie Weyburn, lively curiosity overspreading her usually placid face.

"I think I know," volunteered Mary Reynolds. "Miss Harlowe was telling me only last night that she wishes to organize a club of just Harlowe House girls, with a president and other officers. The club will have a constitution and by-laws and every member will have to live up to them."

"Wouldn't that be splendid?" asked Cecil Ferris, a gray-eyed, black-haired freshman who made up in energy what she lacked in height."

"Who would be president I wonder," murmured Evelyn, shooting a glance of apparent innocence about the circle.

"You'd make a good president, Miss Ward," declared Mary Reynolds, in open admiration. To her beauty-loving little soul Evelyn was the most exquisite person in the world.

"*I*," cried Evelyn in well-simulated amazement. "I wouldn't attempt to be. I am not clever or popular enough."

"I believe you would be the very one. You are so independent and know just how to do things." Now that Mary had suggested it, it met with Nettie Weyburn's placid approval. Cecil Ferris echoed it. She, too, had fallen under the spell of Evelyn's beauty.

"I must run along or be late to chapel," murmured Evelyn modestly, and hurried off at precisely the wisest moment to further her own cause. The ambition to become the president of the proposed club had sprung into life in her self-centered young soul as she stood reading the bulletin, and she determined that she would leave nothing undone to obtain the honor.

At luncheon that day she took particular pains to be unusually friendly to every one with whom she came in contact, exhibiting a gay graciousness of manner toward a number of girls she had secretly labeled, "digs, prigs and plodders." This quite won their trusting hearts and made them innocently wonder how they had, so far, happened to miss becoming really well acquainted with Miss Ward.

When at five o'clock the big living room began to fill, Evelyn was among the first there, with a dazzling smile for all comers. At ten minutes past five the thirty-three girls, who claimed Harlowe House as their home were sitting or standing expectantly about the room,

waiting for Grace, who stood at one end of the room with Emma, to call the meeting to order and enter upon the discussion of that "most important subject."

"I have asked you to come here this afternoon because I believe the time has arrived to try out a plan which I have had in my mind ever since college began," stated Grace, by way of beginning. Then in clear, concise sentences she told of her desire that her girls should be self-governing and of how much good fellowship their banding themselves together would create. "I thought, if you approved of the plan, we might elect our officers at once, and appoint a committee to draw up the constitution and by-laws. I am going to ask you to talk it over among yourselves for ten minutes, while Miss Dean and I prepare some balloting slips," she concluded, and at once a loud buzz of eager conversation began.

It was fifteen minutes before Grace again called the meeting to order, and appointed four tellers, who distributed ballots. Then nominations were in order.

"I nominate Miss Ward for president," proposed Cecil Ferris.

"I second the motion," came from Mary Reynolds.

Grace could hardly control the surprise in

her voice, when, after waiting a little, she asked: "Are there any further nominations?"

"I nominate Miss Sampson," called a small pale girl from her perch in the window seat, with a fond smile in the direction of her roommate. Another girl seconded the nomination, and it was then moved and seconded that the nominations for president be closed. The nomination for vice-president, secretary and treasurer were then in order and after they were closed the voting began.

"Well, of all things," whispered Emma to Grace, who sank into the chair beside her friend, a peculiar expression on her fine face. "I never dreamed of matters taking that turn, did you?"

Grace shook her head. It had indeed come as a shock. She had thought of the club as a novel and possible means of bringing the Harlowe House girls into a closer relationship with one another. She had never considered the possibility of Evelyn being president of the club. It was evident that her nomination had come about through admiration of her undeniable beauty. She was absolutely unfit for any such office. Grace hoped, devoutly, that Miss Sampson, a tall, capable young woman, with a likable personality and a cheery, hearty manner of speaking, would be elected.

Emma made no further remark, but watched the tellers with calculating eyes. At last one of them, who had been industriously making notations on a sheet of paper, rose to announce the results of the election.

"The total number of votes cast for president was thirty-three. Of these Miss Ward received twenty-nine"—an enthusiastic clapping of hands sounded—"Miss Sampson four." She then went on to read the result of the balloting for the other three officers. Nettie Weyburn had won the vice-presidency, Cecil Ferris had been chosen secretary, while quiet little Mary Reynolds had been made treasurer. The reading of each name elicited its quota of applause, but it was plain that, of the four officers, Evelyn was, by far, the greatest favorite. After appointing a committee of four girls to assist her in drawing up the constitution and by-laws, Grace said pleasantly: "Will the new officers please come forward so that we can all see you. You must be formally introduced, you know."

The newly elected officers rose from their various positions which they occupied in the room and advanced to where Grace stood. About Evelyn Ward's red lips played a smile of suppressed triumph as she shook the hand Grace offered her and listened to the former's sincere wish for her success. For an instant

the gray eyes studied the perfect face gravely, as though trying to penetrate what lay behind its smiling mask. Then Grace turned to greet the vice-president, just in time to miss the mocking flash which lighted Evelyn's blue eyes.

CHAPTER XIII

PLANNING FOR THE RECEPTION

THE committee on the constitution and by-laws for the new club met the very next evening and drew up a terse little document setting forth their object in banding themselves together. Grace had already made note of the few rules she wished the girls to observe, but, so far as possible, she wished the committee to draw up their own regulations, subject to her approval. To create a spirit of independence and self-confidence in the girls of Harlowe House had been Grace's basic motive. She realized that many of them were hampered with an undue sense of gratitude which made them too humble for their own interest. She purposed to make them self-reliant and free. Therefore the rules which she herself made were few and sensible, relating chiefly to the care of rooms, the entertaining of guests and

the problems which, if not properly handled, were the most likely to cause friction among so many young women of so many different dispositions.

"But what are we to do about money, Miss Harlowe?" asked Mary Reynolds in a plaintive tone, when the question arose of whether the club should be assessed for dues, and Grace spoke against it. "Of what use is it to have a treasureless treasurer?"

The committee set up a unanimous giggle.

"That is really a serious question," smiled Grace, "and one which the girls will have to decide for themselves. I should not wish any girl to feel that she were obliged to contribute money to the club, even for dues. We are not obliged to conform to any particular set of rules. Our club can be a purely informal organization with no obligations attached to it."

"But it would be splendid to have a little money in the treasury," interposed Louise Sampson. "I know what we can do," she went on eagerly. "Let us make the dues a dollar a year, and pledge ourselves to earn that sum. Any one who feels that she can neither earn nor give a dollar can be a member of the club just the same. Then we could give entertainments or concerts or something and start a little fund of our own."

Grace's gray eyes sparkled. Louise Sampson was a girl after her own heart. "Then you must ask your president to call a meeting. She can instruct the secretary to post a notice on the bulletin board," she advised.

The committee seized upon Louise's plan with avidity.

"Why can't we post a notice and have done with it?" asked Cecil Ferris innocently.

"Because we have just made a law that the president shall be notified of proposed meetings and shall post a bulletin to that effect," reminded Grace.

The girls remained for another hour, discussing their plans and reconstructing their by-laws previous to voting on them. It was decided to have a weekly meeting to take place on each Tuesday between five and six o'clock in the afternoon, but a special meeting might be called at any time at the request of a member, but at the president's discretion.

"The last clause in that by-law is unfortunate," criticized Emma, when, in the privacy of their room that night, Grace went over with her friend the club rules as she had set them down.

"I know what you mean." Grace gave an impatient sigh. "Still, as president of the club Miss Ward must be consulted about things.

You think she is likely to refuse to call a meeting at the request of a member, if she happens to be so inclined, don't you?"

"I do, and she will," prophesied Emma. "I wouldn't lose any sleep over it, Gracie, but still it's a good plan to be prepared in advance for the beauteous Evelyn's vagaries. To change the subject, I have heard very little mention made of the sophomore reception in the house. I wonder if it is because some of the girls have no evening gowns?"

Grace sat up in her chair, with a start of surprise. "Really, Emma, I had forgotten all about the reception. I suppose it slipped my mind because it is to be held so much later this year on account of repairing the gymnasium. It will hardly be over until Thanksgiving will be upon us, and then, oh, joy! we'll see the dear old Sempers. I must see if there is anything I can do to help the girls get ready for it. I hope they understand that their summer dresses will do nicely."

For the next three days Grace made it a point to inquire tactfully into the reception plans of the Harlowe House girls. She discovered that Emma's conjecture had been only too correct. The bare mention of evening gowns had intimidated them, and, worse still, only three or four of them had been especially invited by sopho-

mores. This was partly accounted for by the fact that, while the sophomore class was large, it was completely outnumbered by the entering class. Remembering that the same state of affairs had prevailed when she had entered Overton as a freshman, Grace proceeded to make a round of calls which began with the members of the reception committee, and included Violet Darby, Myra Stone, Laura Atkins, Mildred Taylor, Patience, Kathleen and others of the upper classes whom she knew well, though not intimately. The reception committee had expressed their absolute willingness to allow the upper class girls to help them out on escort duty and the girls themselves entered heartily into the plan.

"I'll walk over to Harlowe House with you now and invite Mary Reynolds," declared Kathleen West, who was the last girl on Grace's list. "I'm glad to have the opportunity. What a bright little thing Mary is? She is quick as a flash when it comes to grasping an idea. I tell her she has the making of a good newspaper woman in her."

"She is Emma's star pupil in English. Emma says she writes the most original themes."

"She has all sorts of queer fancies about people and things," went on Kathleen. "I can't

begin to tell you, Grace, how glad I am to be of some help to her. I must do something to make up for lost time." A faint color tinged Kathleen's pale face.

"You are doing a great deal for Mary Reynolds, Kathleen. She loves you dearly?"

"It certainly is nice to be liked," returned Kathleen softly. "If it hadn't been for you and Elfreda and Patience I would have gone on in the same hard, selfish spirit in which I began college."

"As it is, you are one of the literary lights of Overton, and a joy to your friends," said Grace gayly. "I wish you were at Harlowe House this year with Emma and me."

"I wish I were," sighed Kathleen, "but I didn't feel that it would be fair to apply for admission there. You see, Grace, my salary on the newspaper, during the summer, is a generous one, and, by managing carefully, I can pay my expenses in college for the year with it. I don't have to do that, however, for every week I write a story for the Sunday edition of our paper which more than pays my board at Wayne Hall. Then I send in extra space articles and go out on special stories during the Christmas and Easter vacations. I am never really very short of money, so I'm not eligible as a member of your household."

"You are a clever, capable girl, Kathleen," averred Grace, with honest admiration, "and I am proud to be your friend."

A long look of perfect understanding passed between the two. It had come only after many days of misunderstanding and doubt.

"Dear Loyalheart, I can never forgive myself for making you so unhappy," Kathleen's crips tones trembled.

"And I shall never forgive you if you mention it again," retorted Grace. "You mustn't recall such things. I am enough of a believer in destiny to feel that we had to go through a kind of probation period before we were ready to be friends."

"It's dear in you to say so, Grace, but I know myself, and how contemptibly I behaved. I've been determined to say this to you ever since I came back to college, but you have never given me the least chance until now."

" 'Loyalheart' was the highest proof of your regard you could have given me," reminded Grace gently. "I don't need any other reminders. I must go, Kathleen. Did I hear you say you were going with me?"

"Yes."

Kathleen slipped into her hat and coat, and, as they went down Mrs. Elwood's familiar stairs and strolled out into the crisp autumn

air, arm in arm, Kathleen felt that she could never be thankful enough to the girl who had taught her the true meaning of college spirit.

CHAPTER XIV

A DISQUIETING THOUGHT

WHEN half way across the campus the two young women encountered Evelyn Ward. The cold crisp November air had deepened the pink in her cheeks to living rose. Her violet eyes fairly blazed with light and sparkle, and her wonderful golden hair peeped in fascinating little curls from under her gray velour hat. She wore a three-quarter length gray coat, cut in the smartest fashion, and a passing glance at her would have left one with the impression that she was in affluent circumstances.

"How can a girl who can't afford to pay her college expenses wear such smart clothes?" was Kathleen's appraising comment after they had passed Evelyn, who nodded to them in condescending fashion.

"Her sister, Ida, makes them. She told me so when she came here to ask me to take Miss

Ward into Harlowe House. She is a very pretty girl, isn't she?"

Kathleen nodded. "How are things at Harlowe House?" she inquired irrelevantly.

"Going beautifully. I told you about our club didn't I?"

"Not a word. I haven't seen you for a week."

The newspaper girl listened interestedly to Grace's account of the club. "It would make a good story for my paper," she commented. "How about it, Grace?"

"Your welcome to it if the girls don't object. Suppose you come as a guest to our next meeting and ask their permission."

"I'll do it," promised Kathleen.

Mary Reynolds received and accepted Kathleen's invitation to the reception with unmistakable joy. Grace had sent home for a pink silk evening gown, which she had worn but little, and fairly forced it, with slippers, stockings and gloves, upon the reluctant Mary, with the plea that pink was not her color and therefore she never wore the frock. Aside from shortening it, it had needed little alteration, and when the night of the sophomore reception arrived, Kathleen appeared, an hour before the time to start for the dance, to help Mary dress. She brought a cluster of pinky-white roses and a pink chiffon scarf, which, she diplomatically

insisted, did not go well with any of her gowns and exactly matched Mary's.

"I can't believe that I am I," Mary said happily, as she viewed herself wonderingly in the round dressing-table mirror. She clasped her thin, childish hands impulsively together. "I wish every girl in the world had such good friends and pretty clothes as I have!"

"I hope no one has such elusive hooks and eyes on their clothes as I have," grumbled Emma Dean, who had appeared in the doorway in time to hear Mary's heartfelt remark. "I have permanently dislocated one shoulder and ruined the charming curves of both my elbows forever, in a vain, but valiant, effort to unite one miserable hook and eye, which I'm sure the dressmaker purposely sewed out of my reach."

"Poor Emma," sympathized Kathleen. "Let me help you."

Emma surrendered herself to Kathleen's deft fingers with a ludicrous gesture of resignation.

"Are all the Harlowe House girls going?" asked Kathleen.

"Yes; thanks to the juniors and seniors, not one has been left out. It is such a clear, pleasant night the campus house girls won't need carriages," answered Grace. "It is eight o'clock now. Don't you think you had better start? You go on with the girls, Emma. I'll

run over some time during the evening for a few minutes."

After the merrymakers had set out for the gymnasium, Grace retired to her office to write a letter to her mother. She had hardly settled herself when the door bell rang and she heard a high, clear voice asking the maid for Miss Ward.

"Please tell her to hurry, my car is waiting," instructed the voice, as the maid ushered the newcomer into the living-room. Grace glanced through the open door of the office into the next room. In Evelyn's escort she recognized Althea Parker, one of the most snobbish girls at Overton College, and a member of the sophomore class. Evelyn's declaration on her arrival at Overton that she intended to cultivate the richest girls in college now came back to Grace with disagreeable force.

"Good evening, Miss Harlowe," hailed Althea, as Grace rose and went forward to greet her. "We are going to be late. I hope Evelyn won't keep me waiting." There was a touch of impatience in her voice.

Even as she spoke there was a patter of light feet on the stairs, and Evelyn appeared in the doorway, her evening coat and scarf on her arm.

Grace gave an involuntary gasp of admira-

tion, while Althea cried out openly, "Evelyn Ward, you are wonderful!"

Evelyn's violet blue eyes flashed with gratified vanity. She worn an exquisite gown of white silk and lace made in an apparently simple but very smart fashion, which revealed the pure beauty of her white throat and rounded arms, increasing her loveliness tenfold. She wore white silk stockings and white satin slippers with little rhinestone buckles. Her thick golden hair was drawn high on her head in a graceful knot and clustered in little curls about her temples and over her forehead, while her whole face was alive with excitement. At her corsage was an immense bunch of violets, evidently sent her by her escort.

"Shall I do?" she asked pertly, walking over to the living-room mirror for a last peep at herself.

"You look very lovely to-night," said Grace honestly.

"Thank you," she swept Grace a curtsey. A faint mocking smile played about her red lips, as though she doubted the sincerity of the remark. Slipping on her evening coat of white broadcloth, and placing an extremely handsome scarf of white and gold over her pretty head, Evelyn walked to the door, followed by Althea Parker, who, divided between admiration of

Evelyn and fear of being late, was talking rapidly in her high, excited voice.

"Good night, Miss Harlowe," she nodded.

"Oh, yes, good night," called Evelyn carelessly.

Grace leaned back in her chair and smiled at Evelyn's slightly cavalier treatment of herself. "How her sister has spoiled her," she mused. "She treats me as though I were one of the maids. To see her to-night one would be quite likely to imagine that she, rather than Miss Parker, were the richest girl in Overton."

A sudden, startled look stole into Grace's eyes. "Why, where——" She paused as though she had come upon something which did not quite please her. As a matter of fact it had recurred to her with an unpleasant jolt that Evelyn was wearing an evening gown entirely too expensive for her present circumstances. So were her evening coat, her scarf and all the dainty appointments which so perfectly matched the white silk frock. Again she recalled that Ida Ward planned and made all her sister's gowns. Even so, she must have spent considerable money on Evelyn's evening clothes. Suppose these things were to be noticed and commented upon by the girls in the house, or by outsiders who knew nothing of the real source of Evelyn's wardrobe? Suppose

some one were ill-natured enough to say that a girl who could afford such expensive gowns ought to be able to pay her own expenses and give her place in Harlowe House to some one more needy. Had not Kathleen asked how Evelyn could afford to wear such smart clothes?

Yet on the other hand, there was nothing to be done. Grace did not feel it within her province to take Evelyn to task on the subject of her wearing apparel. All she could do was to trust that what had perplexed her would pass unnoticed and uncriticized.

CHAPTER XV

A SEMPER FIDELIS REUNION

"O FRABJOUS day!" rejoiced Emma Dean, using her bath towel as a scarf and performing a weird dance about the room. "I know I shall go chortling through my classes this morning in a highly undignified manner. To think that dear old Semper Fidelis will hold forth again in the same old haunts! And the most beautiful part is that there will be no vacant chairs."

Emma's delight was reflected on Grace's face. It was the morning before Thanksgiving

Day and the two young women were preparing to go to breakfast, full of happy anticipation, for the various afternoon trains were to bring to them their Semper Fidelis comrades. It had all begun with Elfreda's and Mabel Ashe's promises to spend Thanksgiving at Harlowe House. Then Elfreda had persuaded Arline Thayer, whom she saw frequently in New York, to join them. Arline had written to Ruth, who had come on to New York for a long visit to her chum in time to swell the band. Elfreda had promptly written Grace that if she would see that Miriam and Anne put in an appearance at the proper moment, the Briggs Helping Hand Society would guarantee that the other members should appear at Overton on the appointed day.

"Elfreda has taken rather a large contract on her hands," Grace had said to Emma, on receiving the letter. "She evidently knows what she's doing, so I had better write to Miriam and Anne."

Miriam's promise to come had been easily obtained, but Anne was not sure of attending the Semper Fidelis reunion, until the week before Thanksgiving, when Everett Southard, who was then playing in Shakespearian repertoire in New York, obligingly arranged to give the "Taming of the Shrew" on the day before

Thanksgiving, and "King Richard III" on Thanksgiving Day. As Anne did not appear in either play, her Thanksgiving freedom was assured.

And now the great day had dawned at last! There were to be recitations in the morning, but college would close at noon, not to reopen until the following Monday. The Semper Fidelis girls were to be Elfreda's guests at Vinton's that night at a six o'clock dinner. On Thanksgiving morning they were to breakfast at the Tourraine as the guests of Ruth and Arline. Thanksgiving dinner at Martell's was to be Anne's and Miriam's part of the celebration, while Thanksgiving night Emma and Grace were to be hostesses at Vinton's, their favorite rendezvous.

Grace would have dearly loved to be hostess at the Thanksgiving dinner, but she felt that her duty lay with her household. She wondered whether it would be really right for her to remain away from Harlowe House for so many meals. After long and earnest discussion, she and Emma had arranged that she would give up eating Thanksgiving dinner with her friends, while Emma cheerfully agreed to preside at the Harlowe House breakfast table on Thanksgiving morning. It was decided that Louise Sampson, of whom Grace had grown

extremely fond, was the best possible person to leave in charge during their absence on Thanksgiving night, for neither Grace nor Emma felt that they could bear to miss that last gathering together of their beloved Semper Fidelis friends.

"I wonder who will be first on the scene," speculated Grace.

"Consult the time table, my child," advised Emma. "I have no time for speculation. I am starting on a hunt in darkest Deanery for my cuff links. They are tucked away in some remote corner of the Dean territory, but which corner?"

"They are in one end of your handkerchief box. I saw you put them there yesterday, you ridiculous person," laughed Grace.

"Thank you, thank you! 'One good turn deserves another,'" quoted Emma fervently. "Bring forth the fateful time table and I'll sort out the trains and the order of arrival of the clan.

"I haven't a time table," confessed Grace.

"Then we'll have to let the trains run merrily on, and the railroad do its perfect work. I'm sorry I can't pay my debt of gratitude. I am always helpful. I was always helpful. I have been helpful. I would be helpful. I might have been helpful and I may yet be help-

ful," conjugated Emma hopefully, "but not without a time table."

"I appreciate your splendid spirit of helpfulness even though it isn't of any use at present," assured Grace satirically. "I suppose——"

A long reverberating ring of the bell cut short her remark.

The two friends exchanged questioning glances.

"It can't be one of the girls. It's only eight o'clock," was Emma's quick comment.

Grace opened the door and listened intently. Emma joined her, peering over her shoulder. Then Miss Duncan's dignified assistant in English gave an unmistakable, though subdued, war whoop, and, seizing Grace by the hand, made for the stairs. Grace needed no assistance. An instant later they brought up at the foot of the stairs and made a simultaneous rush for a tall, plump young woman, enveloping her in a tempestuous embrace.

"I might have known you'd be the first," cried Grace with joyful affection. "You must have taken a train in the middle of the night."

"I did," returned J. Elfreda Briggs calmly. "We are living in New York this winter, so Pa brought me to the station in his own pet car and saw me safely on my way. Emma Dean, you

good old comrade, how are you?" Elfreda turned from Grace to Emma.

Emma surveyed Elfreda with fond eyes. "Just now I'm overcome at seeing you, J. Elfreda. How we have missed you!" Depth of feeling for the moment checked Emma's irrepressible flow of humor. Next to Grace, in her regard, came the one-time stout girl, now merely plump and extremely attractive.

Tears flashed across J. Elfreda's eyes as she stood looking into the faces of these friends, whom she loved so truly, yet saw so seldom. "Missing people has been my greatest cross this year," she said, her voice not quite steady. "There's no use in making a fuss, though. I'm beginning to learn that."

A brief silence fell upon the three classmates.

"Have you had your breakfast, Elfreda?" asked Grace, almost abruptly.

"Are there waffles?" counter-questioned Elfreda.

"There can be. The Harlowe House kitchen boasts of waffle irons, bought with this occasion in view."

"Then I am heart and soul for breakfast," avowed Elfreda. "I ate my usual sumptuous repast of half a grape fruit and a piece of dry toast, plus one small cup of black coffee, on the

train. I haven't had a waffle since I was here in August. I wonder how they would taste," she added innocently.

"You'll know before long," promised Grace. "Emma take Elfreda upstairs to our room, while I ask Sarah to make the waffles."

Half an hour later they sat around the breakfast table, a contented trio. After Emma had left them to go to her work, Grace and Elfreda had a long confidential conversation over their coffee. The noon train brought Mabel Ashe, Arline and Ruth, while from off the afternoon trains stepped Anne and Miriam, the smiling Emerson twins, Elizabeth Wade, Marian Cummings and Elsie Wilton.

It was a congenial and talkative company that, as Elfreda's guests, graced Vinton's at six o'clock dinner that night. Kathleen West, who had been prevailed upon to spend at least one Thanksgiving at Overton, instead of on duty on her paper, was one of three guests of honor, Mabel Ashe and Patience Eliot were the others. By special arrangement a table that would seat fifteen persons had been set in their favorite rendezvous, the mission alcove. Elfreda, Grace, Anne and Miriam, rejoicing in their reunion, had made a tour of the stores together than afternoon, and gleefully carrying the fruits of their shopping to Vinton's had

decorated the table with flowers, ribbons and funny little favors.

The Overton girls that happened to drop into Vinton's that night smiled appreciatively at the gay little company in the alcove. A glance in that direction on the part of the upper class girls was sufficient. They knew that Semper Fidelis, the darling of the Overton clubs, was making merry. The freshmen, however, had to have matters explained to them by their friends.

"That Semper Fidelis club was the life of Overton," Althea Parker explained to Evelyn Ward. "That's one reason I asked you to come here with me to-night. I wanted you to see them together." The two were seated at a small table not far from that of the Sempers.

Evelyn made no response. Her eyes were fixed upon the mission alcove. She knew, only too well, that Althea's invitation to dinner had not been disinterested. She had learned to know that Althea was not only snobbish, but self-seeking as well. For whatever she gave she demanded value received. Evelyn had been in the living-room when Grace and Elfreda returned from their shopping. She had heard them discussing the dinner, and had lost no time in slipping on her wraps and carrying the news to Althea, who, as she had hoped, had

at once invited her to dinner at Vinton's.

"Althea thinks I'll attract the attention of those girls," Evelyn had speculated shrewdly.

Meanwhile the girls in the alcove, quite unconscious of the discussion going on about them at the other tables, were in their element. One after another the dear wraiths of their Overton days were summoned, to be laughingly and lovingly reviewed, then lingeringly laid to rest again.

"Girls, do you remember the dinner we gave here after the ghost party?" asked Mabel Ashe, her brown eyes alight with mischief. "Some of your girls weren't here that night, but at least half of you were."

"I ought to remember it," declared Elfreda significantly.

"Yes, Elfreda, it was in honor of you, I believe," laughed Arline. The dinner to which Mabel referred belonged to Elfreda's freshman year at Overton.

"It was indeed," affirmed Anne Pierson. "Every one of our four years brought its own parties."

"And its own problems," supplemented Miriam.

"Of whom we were which," murmured J. Elfreda.

Every one laughed at this naïve assertion.

"But we've all turned out creditably," smiled Miriam Nesbit, "thanks to our Loyalheart. She opened the way to good comradeship for me, long ago, in my high school days."

"She found my father for me!" said Ruth Denton, her eyes eloquent.

"She stood by me when I needed her most," said Anne.

"Girls, I won't——" Grace half rose from her chair, but was gently shoved into it again.

"Sit still and hear the rest of your misdeeds," commanded Mabel. "Go on, Arline."

"She helped me to be unselfish and to think of others," was Arline's sweet tribute.

"She made me over," asserted Elfreda with emphasis.

"She taught me college spirit," said Kathleen softly.

"Sara and I didn't like college and never had much fun until Grace asked us to join the Sempers," declared Sue Emerson.

"She was the first to welcome me to Overton, and has given me countless good times since then," said Patience.

"She taught me to look for the best rather than the worst, even in my enemies," declared Mabel Ashe.

"We Decided to Give Our Loyalheart a Loyalty Token."

Elizabeth Wade, Marian Cummings and Elsie Wilton each added their tribute.

"Girls, if you only knew how terribly this embarrasses me," pleaded Grace. "Every one of you have done the nicest sort of things for me. I think——"

"You are not allowed to think," put in Miriam. "We will do the thinking for the next two minutes. Besides J. Elfreda has something to say. Go ahead, Elfreda."

"Grace, you've heard what we all had to say about you, but there is a whole lot that we can never find words for. Each of us knows best what you've been to us, as individuals, and we all know that there will never be any other girl quite as dear, and true, and loyal as you are to us. So we decided to give our Loyalheart a loyalty token, and here it is. Hold out your arm," commanded Elfreda.

Grace held out her pretty, bare arm in obedient bewilderment. Something shining slipped over her wrist. She stared at it in fascination.

"How beautiful!" she gasped. "It can't be for me!" The bracelet was a wide band of dull gold, chased with a pattern of tiny leaves, and, at intervals, its golden circle was starred with small diamonds. It was the most expensive piece of jewelry Grace had ever owned.

Every one of our initials is inside," informed

Elsie Wilton triumphantly. Grace slipped the band off her arm and peered into it. Sure enough there were rows of tiny initials inscribed on the smooth gold.

"And now let us drink a toast to our Loyalheart and go up to the Tourraine," proposed Elfreda, after the excitement attending the presentation of the bracelet had died out. "Here's to our Loyalheart! Drink her down!"

The emptied lemonade glasses were set on the table and the party rose to go.

As they were passing out, Grace and Anne walked with linked arms, determined to make the most of their brief hour together.

"Oh, Grace, I almost forgot to ask you," began Anne, "who was that beautiful girl at the next table to the alcove? I saw you speak to her. She was with Miss Parker, that little girl of 19— who has so much money."

"That was Evelyn Ward, Anne, and thereby hangs a tale which I'll entertain you with to-morrow. One thing about her will interest you. She wants to become an actress. She thinks you are the wonder of this century. I'll introduce her to you to-morrow."

"She is beautiful," commented Anne, "and if she is really sincere in her ambition I might help her to attain her ambition."

CHAPTER XVI

THE INTERRUPTED CONFIDENCE

THE days that lay between Thanksgiving and Christmas passed swiftly and uneventfully for Grace. As the holiday vacation drew near she was divided, however, between her desire to go home and her duty to Harlowe House. It was Emma Dean who finally settled the question by announcing that she did not intend to go home for Christmas and would gladly look after things during Grace's absence. The trip home was too expensive Emma had stated frankly, and her railroad fare would be quite a help when added to the Dean housekeeping fund. Once she had made her decision to stay at Overton she began to lay plans for a happy holiday season for the Harlowe House girls, who, without exception, were also to remain in Overton for their vacation. Two days before Christmas Grace left Overton for Oakdale, with many injunctions to Emma to take things easy and to telegraph her at once if she needed her.

Once at home a round of merry parties began. True to their promise Jessica and Reddy had come back to Oakdale for Christmas. The

only missing member of the Eight Originals was Anne, and the Sunday morning following Christmas Day she walked into the Harlowe's living room accompanied by Everett Southard and his sister. She could not bear to allow the holidays to pass without seeing her friends, so she and the Southards had taken the midnight train for Oakdale, determined to spend at least one day there. That evening a contented, happy company gathered at the Nesbits, as Miriam's and David's guests, at a dinner given in honor of the unexpected arrivals. After a short, but exceedingly earnest, confab in a cosy corner just off the hall, Anne and David had appeared arm in arm, and, to an accompaniment of meaning smiles, had announced their engagement. Although Miriam Nesbit was entirely unaware of it, four pairs of eyes, belonging to the feminine half of the Eight Originals had kept a lynx-like watch upon her and Everett Southard. Afterward Grace confided to Anne that she believed Miriam did like Mr. Southard a little, and it was quite plain to be seen that Mr. Southard cared for her, while Jessica and Nora were wagging their heads in secret agreement of the same belief.

Only one thing marred Grace's pleasure in being at home and that was the thought that she was making Tom Gray unhappy. Out-

wardly he was the same sunny, smiling Tom she had known for so many years, but there were times when the mask of cheerfulness fell away and Grace read in his eyes a look of pain and longing that caused her to reproach herself. Then her honest nature would reassert itself and she would vow never to promise to marry Tom out of sympathy. Unless there came a time when she was absolutely convinced that he meant more to her than her work she and Tom would have to go on in the same old way.

But aside from this one cloud it seemed to Grace that she had never before so fully appreciated her father and mother. "You grow dearer every minute," she assured them on her last night at home. She sat between them on a little stool, holding a hand of each. "If you don't put me out on the steps to-morrow morning with my luggage, and lock the door in my face, I know I'll never, never have the courage to go away from you. It is really a tragedy, this wanting to be in two places at once."

"Dear child," said her mother softly, while her father stroked her shining hair and wondered how he ever managed to get along without her during the long months she spent at Overton. "We hate to give you up, Gracie,"

he said, "but we love you all the more for your faithfulness to your work."

And that was the thought which Grace took back with her to Overton. She smiled to herself as she swung briskly through the quiet streets. Their approbation had quickened her spirit to put forth fresh effort. She felt as though she could remove mountains if they happened to rise suddenly in her path. And in this state of mental exhilaration she ran up the steps of Harlowe House and, after a second's fumbling with her latchkey, let herself in.

It was almost six o'clock in the afternoon, and the darkness of early January had settled down upon the landscape. A wet, discouraging snow, which made the streets a slush-covered menace to pedestrians, was falling, and Grace gave a soft sigh of satisfaction as she stepped into the cheery, well-lighted hall. Knowing that she was quite likely to find Emma in her room she hurried up the stairs. Her hand was on the door knob when she heard what sounded suspiciously like a sob. Grace flung open the door and rushed into her room, her face alive with concern. What could possibly have happened to make jolly, self-reliant Emma Dean cry? She exclaimed in quick surprise, however, for, other than herself, the room held no occu-

pant. "I'm sure I heard some one crying," she murmured. She listened intently. A moment later the same doleful sound was again borne to her ears. Walking quickly into the bathroom she stood by the door that opened into Evelyn Ward's room.

"It comes from Miss Ward's room," was her second surmisal. "I wonder what I ought to do. She is so easily offended that, if I go to her, she may resent my call and think me meddlesome and interfering." Grace continued to listen uneasily to the unmistakable sounds of grief that came from the next room.

"Something serious has certainly happened. I can't stand it to hear her cry so. I'll take the risk of being misunderstood," she decided with a grim little smile.

Stepping out of her room into the hall she knocked softly on Evelyn's door, receiving no answer. Her second and rather more emphatic knock elicited a faint, "Who is there?"

"Miss Harlowe," answered Grace. "May I come in for a moment, Miss Ward?"

She heard Evelyn moving about the room for a moment, then the door was opened slowly, and with apparent reluctance on the part of the pretty freshman, who had evidently dried her tears for the time being.

"How do you do, Miss Harlowe?" she said

in a queer, strained voice. "I did not know that you had returned from your vacation." She did not offer her hand to Grace. In her blue eyes lay a look of positive fear.

"I came in not more than ten minutes ago," returned Grace, stepping into the room and closing the door after her. Then with her usual directness she said, "Miss Ward, I heard you crying. I came to see if I could help you."

The look of fear in Evelyn's eyes deepened. She continued to regard Grace intently, as though trying to discover whether there could be any other motive for her visit. In spite of the effort she was making to be natural her face expressed absolute consternation.

"It—was—nothing," she stammered, at last. "I am not feeling very well."

Grace was not deceived. She knew that Evelyn was not the kind of girl to cry hysterically over a slight illness. Still she could not force this perverse young woman to tell that which she did not choose to tell.

"I am sorry you won't let me help you. Are you sure that I can't be of service to you."

"*You.*" Evelyn laughed shortly. "No; I am quite sure that *you* can't be."

"Very well." Grace was about to leave the room.

"Wait a minute!" Evelyn's voice rang out sharply. "I—I—will tell you my trouble, Miss Harlowe. It's about—my college fees. I paid part of the money when I came here. My—my—sister has been very ill and can't send the rest of the money. She made a special arrangement with the registrar to make the other payment in November. I've received two notices. I don't know what to do. I can't bear to leave Overton."

"Why didn't you come to me before?" asked Grace with gentle reproach. "I can help you in this matter through the Semper Fidelis fund."

Grace went on to explain the purpose of the Semper Fidelis Club. "We lend the students the money rather than give it to them, because they like to feel that they are proceeding on a strictly business basis. It takes away the slightest idea of charity and makes the girls quite responsible for themselves."

"I see," murmured Evelyn. "But suppose I borrowed the money and then found that I couldn't return it for ever so long?"

"There is neither time limit set nor interest charged on any reasonable sum of money a girl may wish to borrow," returned Grace. "We have the utmost confidence in our borrowers. The very fact that they come to us for help is

an avowal of their honesty. How much money do you wish to borrow, Miss Ward?"

Evelyn rather hesitatingly named a sum considerably in excess of that needed for her college fees. "It—will—pay my expenses for the year and leave me a little besides for emergencies," she explained apologetically. "Then poor Ida can get well and won't have to worry. I am sure I can work at something this summer and pay at least part of the money back to the club."

She swept a swift, speculative glance at Grace from under her eyelashes which quite belied her earnest tones. Grace, however, absorbed for a brief moment in her own thoughts, failed to see it. When she looked at Evelyn the latter's face bore a sweetly grateful expression that made her wonder if she had not been mistaken in her estimate of the, hitherto, troublesome freshman. Her apparent anxiety to relieve her sister of worry over financial difficulties was distinct evidence of an affection of which Grace had not believed Evelyn capable. "I have misjudged her," was Grace's thought. "She really cares for her sister."

Aloud she said, "I will write at once to Miss Thayer, who is the president of the Semper Fidelis Club, and in whose name the account stands, telling her the circumstances. This far

we have not received many calls for help since college opened, so there is quite a little money in bank. It is during the last half of the year that we make the greatest number of loans. I am sorry that your sister has been ill. If you will give me her address I will write to her tonight."

Evelyn flushed hotly. "Oh, no, you mustn't!" she exclaimed sharply. "That is—I mean you—mustn't put yourself—to so much trouble for me," she added lamely.

"It won't be a particle of trouble," assured Grace. "I should like to do so."

Evelyn's confusion deepened. "I—can't ——" she floundered.

Grace regarded her with quiet, searching eyes. But before she had time to go on from wonder at Evelyn's strange objection to her writing her sister to actual suspicion, Evelyn interposed eagerly, "I'll give you the address, with pleasure, Miss Harlowe. Wait a moment." She sprang to her open writing desk and seizing a piece of paper and a pencil wrote energetically for a moment.

"Here it is."

She laid it before Grace, who picked it up and read, "Miss Ida Ward, 320 Duverne Street, Albany, N. Y."

A puzzled frown wrinkled Grace's forehead.

"I thought your sister told me she lived in Burton. I must have misunderstood her."

"So we did," put in Evelyn hurriedly, "but Ida is spending the winter with my aunt in Albany. She went there just before she was taken ill. We may never go back to Burton again to live. Of course I am not sure of that. Perhaps I can find work in a large city during my summer vacation."

"That reminds me," began Grace. "I had a talk with Miss Pierson when she was here about your going on the stage. She saw you at Vinton's, and when I told her you had stage ambitions she said she was quite sure she could find work for you during the summer in a stock company. She will try to take you with her."

"Really!" Evelyn sprang to her feet, her blue eyes glittering with excitement. "Oh, Miss Harlowe, if I could, if she would take me! I'd work so hard and pay every penny of everything I owe."

"But you don't owe anything yet," reminded Grace, smiling.

Evelyn did not answer. It was doubtful whether she heard Grace's last words. She stood perfectly still, a curious look on her beautiful face. Suddenly she said in a low, halting tone, "Miss Harlowe, if you knew how——"

A knock on the door interrupted her speech. Without finishing, she stepped to it and turned the knob. "Hello, Mary," she said indifferently.

"Oh, Miss Harlowe, I didn't know that you had come home," cried Mary Reynolds. "We have all missed you dreadfully, haven't we, Evelyn?"

"Yes," replied Evelyn in her usual indifferent fashion. Then as Grace turned to go she said sweetly, "Thank you so much for your kindness to me, Miss Harlowe."

But Grace reflected disappointedly as she went slowly into her own room that Mary Reynolds' innocent interruption had occurred just in time to prevent the establishment with Evelyn of the very footing which she had been trying all year to gain.

CHAPTER XVII

A WEEK-END IN NEW YORK

TRUE to her promise Grace wrote to Arline Thayer that very evening concerning the sum of money which Evelyn wished to borrow, and three days later she opened a fat letter from the president of

Semper Fidelis from which fell the magic slip of paper which, for Evelyn, meant the way out of her difficulties. Grace pounced with delight upon the letter and was soon deep in its contents.

"We saw Anne as 'Ophelia' last Friday night," Arline wrote. "After the play father gave a little supper for her at our house and invited the Southards, Mabel and Mr. Ashe, Elfreda, Miriam Nesbit and her brother. Miriam came to New York to visit and shop, and it is not hard to guess why her brother came with her. We were all so surprised to see her, and so delighted. She is staying with the Southards, and, Grace, I do believe Everett Southard is in love with her. It is hard to say whether she returns his love, for she doesn't manifest the slightest sign of it. Wouldn't it be splendid if they did decide to go through life together? He is so clever, and a great actor too. Mabel's lawyer has won the most difficult case he ever fought for. He has persuaded Mabel to wear his ring. Their engagement is to be announced next week. I suppose you will hear from Mabel before many days. How I wish you were here. We all miss you so. Can't you come to New York for a week end before Easter? Do try to arrange it. I have so many things to tell you. It would take an age to

write them. Think it over and decide to come. With my dearest love,

"ARLINE."

Grace finished the letter with a happy sigh. She would try to manage to run down to New York for a week end. She wondered how long Miriam intended to stay in the city and she smiled faintly over Arline's comment regarding Miriam and Everett Southard. It was not news to her. Consulting the calendar that hung above the desk, she decided to go the first week in February, and began to plan her work accordingly.

In spite of her secret fears that everything was too perfect to last, not only was her varied household serene, but prospering as well. From the time the Harlowe House girls became a self-governing body the question of putting money in the treasury had been continually agitated. One way and another had been suggested, but it was not until the Christmas holidays that the inspiration had come in the shape of a most toothsome batch of caramels which Louise Sampson had descended into the kitchen and made, one snowy, blustery evening when the club had assembled in the living-room for a social session. The caramels were a signal success, and when Cecil Ferris eyed one

of the delicious brown squares lovingly before popping it into her mouth, then asked reflectively, "Why couldn't we make caramels and sell them to the Overton girls?" the idea was hailed with cries of "Great," "A good idea." "We could easily sell pounds of them."

With one accord they had besieged Louise Sampson with curious questions as to how she had made the caramels and the cost of the ingredients. Louise had laughingly refused to tell her recipe.

After talking things over Louise had sworn Cecil, Mary Reynolds and one other girl to secrecy, imparted the precious recipe to them, and on the next Saturday afternoon they had made their first candy. A gay little poster, drawn by one of the girls, advertised their wares. It was tacked to one side of the college bulletin board, and by nine o'clock on Saturday night the last caramel had gone its destined way, while the success-crowned merchants counted their money and lamented because they had not made half enough caramels.

From then on, caramel-making occupied the spare moments of Louise and her faithful band and the "Harlowe House Caramels" rapidly gained favor. With her usual kindly interest in the success of others Grace, on her return from the Christmas holidays, entered into the

candy making with spirit and energy, doing much to help fill the rush of orders. Try as they might the caramel supply was always running out, for the students found the delicious home-made caramels quite to their taste and they grew daily more popular.

The Harlowe House girls were extremely proud of the growing fund in the treasury. One and all, with the exception of Evelyn Ward, they begged so earnestly to be initiated into the mysteries of caramel making that they were sworn to secrecy at a special meeting of the club and divided into caramel-making squads. It was also decided to make candy only twice a week, on Wednesday and Friday evenings, and set Thursday and Saturday as the days for selling the caramels, which were put up in neat half-pound and pound boxes.

But while this little enterprise was being carried on with a will Evelyn was merely an indifferent onlooker. True she belonged to one squad of the candy makers, but she usually managed to be absent when they worked. Apparently she was not interested in the financial affairs of the Harlowe House Club. For a week or more after the check from Semper Fidelis had been handed to her she had maintained toward Grace an attitude of sweet gratitude, too flattering to be wholly sincere. It had grad-

ually disappeared, however, and the old Evelyn had come to the surface again. Although she was now careful not to offend openly, Grace felt that underneath the thin veneer of reluctant gratitude lay the old dislike which she was sure Evelyn felt for her. In spite of her efforts to judge this strange selfish girl dispassionately Grace knew in her heart that she still disapproved of Evelyn.

The first week in February found Grace looking forward to her week end in New York City. She had arranged to leave Overton on Friday at noon, and on Friday morning she opened her eyes with that feeling of exultation over something delightful just around the corner from her. Then she remembered. In a few hours she would again be with her beloved friends. She went about her work that morning humming under her breath. As she was to take the eleven-thirty train she had said a regretful good-bye to Emma before the latter went to her classes. "How I wish you were going with me, Emma," she had sighed. Emma's eyes had grown wistful for an instant, then she had launched forth into a multitude of pompous and wholly ridiculous reasons why her presence was needed at Harlowe House that made Grace laugh, and, for the time, banished the shadow from her face.

Later as she climbed into the taxicab that was to take her to the station, Emma's face, with its funny little twisted smile, rose before her, and she experienced fresh regret at leaving her behind. It was hardly fair that she should have so much and Emma so little. How bravely Emma had stepped into the breach made by her father's sudden reverse of fortune. So deep was Grace in her own thoughts that she did not realize that they had reached the station until the car came to a sudden stop and the driver stood holding open the door. Handing him her suit case and traveling bag Grace stepped out of the car, and tendering the man her fare, gathered up her luggage and headed for the station. Seating herself on one of the wooden benches inside the station, she placed her traveling effects on the floor beside her and compared her watch with the station clock. Then she rose and going to the ticket window, which had just opened, purchased her ticket and inquired as to whether the train were on time.

"Fifteen minutes late," was the brief reply.

Grace went back to her bench, and, seating herself, opened a magazine she had brought with her. She was turning the leaves interestedly when a sudden banging of the station door caused her to glance up. Here eyes were riveted in surprise upon Evelyn Ward, who,

suit case in hand, hurried over to her with, "Oh, Miss Harlowe, I wonder if you would mind my going to New York with you. I am invited to Althea Parker's for the week end, but she had to go down last night. I tried to see you at Harlowe House, but you had already gone. I would have spoken to you last night about going, but I wasn't quite sure whether I could make it or not." Evelyn's tones were far from concerned.

"You are quite welcome to ride with me," returned Grace briefly. She hardly liked the situation, yet she made it a rule not to interfere with the amusements of the Harlowe House girls. When she had lived at Wayne Hall Mrs. Elwood had never questioned the comings and goings of her girls. Still Grace was not pleased with Evelyn's careless manner of passing over her evident intention to go without even informing Grace of her departure.

Once on the train the two kept up a desultory conversation. But little sympathy existed between them, and the situation grew momentarily more strained. Grace caught Evelyn taking sly peeps at the magazine which she still held. With her usual good nature, Grace hailed the boy who passed through the train with magazines and candy and bought another magazine.

"There is an article in this number which Miss Dean says is worth reading," she explained. "Keep my magazine if you like, and I'll read this."

For the next two hours not a word was exchanged. The two girls read on and on. As the afternoon began to wane Evelyn finished her magazine, took off her hat, and, leaning her head against the high green velvet back of the seat, closed her eyes. At last Grace laid aside her reading, and idly watched, with half dreaming eyes, the fleeting landscape. Occasionally her gaze wandered, in unwilling admiration, to Evelyn's lovely, tranquil face. Why was such great beauty coupled with such tantalizing perversity of spirit? was the thought that sprang unbidden to her mind.

It was long after dark when the two young women passed through the iron gates of the station to where their friends awaited them. Anne, David, Miriam and Arline stood eagerly watching for Grace. At almost the same moment Evelyn spied Althea. On seeing Evelyn's companions, Althea hurried forward in time to receive the much-coveted introduction to Arline Thayer, Anne and the Nesbits. After a brief exchange of courtesies Grace's friends bowed themselves off, gleefully escorting Grace to David's car.

Althea stared moodily after them. "I think they are awfully snobbish," she remarked resentfully. "How did you manage to get away, Evelyn?"

"Don't ask me," Evelyn made a gesture of deprecation. "All I hope is that I'm not found out. I'm glad I overheard Miss Harlowe talking last night about going to-day. If worse comes to worst, I'll say I came down here with her."

"But what if she denies it?"

Evelyn shrugged her shoulders. "Ten chances to one I shall not be missed, but if there is any trouble I'll appeal to her generosity of spirit to help me. She pretends to be so helpful, let her demonstrate her helpfulness by standing between me and Miss Sheldon."

CHAPTER XVIII

A HUMILIATING REPRIMAND

TO GRACE forty-eight hours with her chums seemed hardly longer than forty-eight minutes, and she found it an exceedingly difficult task to divide her time equally among them. She went directly to the Southards for dinner, and to the theater that night with David, Miriam and Miss Southard to see Everett Southard and Anne as the ill-fated king and queen in "Macbeth." To her delight she discovered that the opposite box held Elfreda, Arline, Ruth, Mabel Ashe, Mr. Ashe and Mr. Thayer, and after the play they were Mr. Ashe's guests at supper.

On Saturday the devoted little band gathered at Arline's home at nine o'clock in the morning, determined to crowd every possible bit of pleasure into the hours that were theirs. On Sunday it was Mabel Ashe who played hostess, and on Sunday night a goodly company saw Grace to the station and safely on her way.

It was eleven o'clock when she let herself into Harlowe House, and hurried upstairs, anxious to relax and be comfortable after her long ride. As she had expected, on opening the

door of her room, she saw Emma, her tall, thin figure wrapped in the folds of a gay crêpe kimono, seated before the table, industriously looking over, and marking, themes.

"Hello, Gracious," she caroled amiably, laying down the sheet of paper she held in her hand and making a quick dive for Grace. "I began to thing you weren't coming home tonight. How are you, and how is everybody? In spite of being fairly swamped with themes, I managed to arise in my might and make cocoa. It's in the chocolate pot and there are some extra fine Dean-made sandwiches to match. Now say, 'Emma, you are one in a million, and a cook besides.' Give me your coat and hat. Your kimono and slippers await you."

"What a dear you are, Emma," declared Grace, as she handed her wraps to Emma and began to unhook her skirt. "How I wish you had been with us. The girls were so sorry you couldn't come. Elfreda says she is going to descend upon you some Friday and carry you off for a week end, regardless of howls and protests."

Emma's expressive face lighted with whimsical tenderness, "J. Elfreda never forgets, does she? Here's your cocoa, Grace. Help yourself to sandwiches."

Seating themselves opposite each other at the

oak center table, the plate of sandwiches and the chocolate pot between them, the two young women settled themselves for a talk which lasted until after midnight.

"We are setting a fearful example for our girls," remarked Grace yawning, as they finally arose to prepare for bed. I hope we haven't disturbed Miss Ward. I haven't heard a sound from her room. She must be asleep. I wonder when she came back."

"Came back from where?" asked Emma.

"From New York City. She took the same train that I took and sat with me all the way there."

"She did!" exclaimed Emma. "That doesn't tally with what I heard in the registrar's office Friday afternoon. I'm afraid she didn't ask permission to go, Grace."

"Oh, she must have had permission!" A look of surprise, mingled with consternation, sprang into Grace's eyes.

"Did she tell you she had the joyful sanction of the registrar?" quizzed Emma.

"No-o. She made a half apology for not telling me that she was going to New York. She said she was not sure of going until the last minute. I supposed, of course, that she had permission. Why will she persist in disobeying the rules of the college?" asked Grace despair-

ingly. "What was said in the registrar's office, Emma, or aren't you at liberty to tell me?"

"Of course I am, otherwise I wouldn't have mentioned it," declared Emma. "Friday afternoon I went over to Overton Hall to see Miss Sheldon. Just as I stepped into her office I met Evelyn coming out looking like a young thunder cloud. I wondered what had happened to upset her sweet, even disposition," Emma's tones were distinctly ironical, "and without asking any questions I soon found out. Miss Sheldon herself looked anything but pleased and said: 'That Miss Ward is the most insolent girl with whom I have ever come in contact. I refused to allow her to go to New York City for the week end and she made some extremely impertinent remarks to me. She has a condition to work off. I felt justified in refusing her.' "

"And she disregarded that refusal and went?" questioned Grace wonderingly. "We would never have dreamed of defying the registrar, would we, Emma?"

"Hardly," returned Emma. "Even Laura Atkins in her most anarchistic moods, or Kathleen West with all her thorns set, would have stopped short of that. I hope the high and mighty Evelyn won't try to drag you into this affair."

"How can she?" demanded Grace. "I had nothing to do with it."

"Yes, but you rode down to New York City on the same train and in the same seat with her. She is quite likely to tell the registrar that you countenanced her going even though Miss Sheldon didn't."

"Oh, she couldn't!" burst forth Grace.

"Why couldn't she?" demanded Emma.

Grace shook her head.

"I think you are a trifle hard on her, Emma. I know she is selfish, but I don't believe she is malicious."

"I wish I had your faith in people, Grace," said Emma sincerely. "You always believe them honest until they prove themselves villains, don't you?"

When the next afternoon, Grace received a curt note from Miss Sheldon asking her to come to her office at five o'clock, Emma's prophesy loomed large before her.

"It must be something else," reflected the troubled house mother, as she prepared for her call on Miss Sheldon. Once in the registrar's office, a quick glance at the older woman's face, set in lines of annoyance, was enough to convince Grace that Emma's conjecture had been only too true. Evelyn had in some way managed to make her a party to her disobedience.

"Good afternoon, Miss Harlowe," said Miss Sheldon stiffly. There was no trace of her usual friendly manner. "I sent for you this afternoon for the purpose of clearing up any misunderstanding you may have in regard to your authority here at Overton. The students in the various houses are in every instance subject to the rules of Overton College, and it is the purpose of the faculty to see that these rules are enforced. You have no authority to grant a student leave of absence, particularly after that permission has been refused by me."

Then there followed a further sharp reprimand to which Grace listened gravely, her calm, gray eyes never for an instant leaving Miss Sheldon's face. Something in the younger woman's composure had its effect upon the registrar, who, on first seeing Grace, had allowed her displeasure free rein. She looked searchingly into the quiet face before her and said more gently, "Perhaps I should have asked you to tell me your side of the story, before condemning you, Miss Harlowe."

Ah, so there was another side of the story! It was apparently as Emma had said.

Tears of hurt pride burned behind Grace's eyes, but they never fell. With a brave effort she steadied her voice. "I do not know what has been said to you, Miss Sheldon, but I do

know that I have never given any girl at Harlowe House leave of absence from Overton. I would not presume to do so. I hope I understand the limit of my authority too clearly to overstep it."

"Then you did not take Miss Ward with you to New York City last Friday afternoon?"

"Miss Ward was with me on the train and shared my seat, but until I met her in the station I had not the remotest idea that she intended to go. I dislike to tell you this, Miss Sheldon, but since you have asked me this question I can only tell you the truth."

"I am sorry I spoke so hastily, Miss Harlowe," apologized Miss Sheldon, "but I was greatly displeased. I have sent for Miss Ward. Will you wait until she comes? You need not unless you wish to do so."

"Thank you," said Grace, a shade of offended dignity in her voice, "but I must go back to Harlowe House. It is almost dinner time. Good evening, Miss Sheldon."

Once outside Overton Hall her composure took wings and she brushed the thick-gathering tears from her eyes as she hurried blindly across the snow-covered campus in the gray twilight. She was still smarting under the hurt of the registrar's sharp words. It was unspeakably humiliating to be told that she had

overstepped her authority. She had thought that Miss Sheldon knew her too well for that. It merely served to show how little one knew persons, she reflected bitterly. As for Evelyn, the angry color dyed Grace's cheeks afresh as she thought of the girl's treachery, and she made a resentful vow that Evelyn Ward should not be admitted to Harlowe House for her sopohomore year.

The brisk walk across the campus in the crisp winter air cooled her anger, and by the time she had reached the house she felt her resentment, in a measure, vanishing.

"You were right, Emma," she announced as she walked into their room where Emma sat plodding laboriously through her weekly mending.

"About Evelyn?"

"Yes."

Emma finished the sleeve of the blouse she was mending with a flourish. Then, casting a swift, upward glance at Grace, she began singing dolorously.

"Mend, mend, mend,
On the waist that's weary and worn.
Stitch, stitch, stitch,
Each tatter so jagged and torn.
Collar and cuffs and sleeves,

Cobble and darn and baste,
Before they gape in a ghastly row,
And shriek the dirge of the waist.''

Grace's gloomy expression changed to a faint smile which broadened as Emma's chant went on. At the end of the verse she laughed outright.

''I couldn't be sad for long with you about, Emma,'' she said affectionately. ''How can you think of such funny things on the spur of the moment?''

''Oh, I don't know,'' drawled Emma. ''Tell me about everything, Gracious.''

''I will,'' nodded Grace, ''but I must run downstairs to the kitchen for a minute. I'll be back directly.''

It was fifteen minutes before she returned. Emma had finished her mending and was on her knees before the chiffonier putting her waists away.

''Now I'll tell you,'' began Grace.

Emma turned her head to listen, but before Grace had time to begin the door was flung violently open and Evelyn Ward rushed in, her blue eyes bright with anger. ''How could you tell Miss Sheldon that I didn't go to New York with you? You could have helped me and she wouldn't have said a word to Miss Wilder.

Now I shall be expelled from college and it is all your fault. You are——"

At this juncture, however, Emma Dean took a hand. Without giving Grace an opportunity to say a word she marched over to the excited Evelyn. "Miss Ward, leave this room instantly, and do not come into it again until you have asked Miss Harlowe to pardon you."

In contrast to Evelyn's half-screamed denunciation Emma's voice was low and even, but it vibrated with stern command.

"I—she——" began Evelyn, but the look in Emma's eyes was too much for her. With a half-sobbing cry of anger she rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XIX

AN UNINTENTIONAL LISTENER

"DELIGHTFUL young person," commented Emma dryly, as the resounding slam of the door echoed through the room.

Grace walked slowly over to the chair which she had been occupying when Evelyn had made her tempestuous entrance, and sat down. There was a brief silence, then, "Do you sup-

pose Miss Wilder will send Evelyn home?"

"Grace, you aren't going to try to intercede for that hateful girl after this," Emma's tones quivered with vexation.

"I don't know. I suppose it wouldn't be of much use. Miss Wilder won't tolerate out and out disobedience. I—yes, Emma, I'm going to see if I can save her. I'm going now."

Grace sprang from her chair and began slipping into her wraps.

Emma eyed her moodily, struggling between approval and disapproval, but saying nothing.

"Good-bye, dear," called Grace over her shoulder as she hurried out the door. "I'm afraid I'll be late for dinner. Don't wait for me."

Outside the house she paused, glanced toward Overton Hall, then set off in the opposite direction toward Miss Wilder's home.

"I hope she's at home," was Grace's anxious thought as she rang the bell.

"Miss Wilder's in the library, miss. I'll call her," informed the maid. "Come in. It's Miss Harlowe wants to see her, isn't it?"

"Yes," Grace smiled in pleasant appreciation of the maid's remembrance of her.

"Good evening, Miss Harlowe." Miss Wilder rose to greet her unexpected visitor and offered her a chair.

Grace returned the greeting, then seated herself directly opposite the dean.

"Miss Wilder, I came to see you," she burst forth, "to ask you if there is—if you could give Miss Ward another chance. She came to me to-night and said that she was to be sent home for what happened last Saturday. I am sorry that she has put herself in such an unpleasant position, but I am more sorry still for her sister, who has made so many sacrifices to give her a college education. I never told you much about Miss Ward, Miss Wilder. Let me tell you now."

Miss Wilder listened attentively to Grace's eager outpouring.

"Miss Ward's case has not yet been settled," she said slowly. "It rests with me whether she shall remain at Overton. I will think over what you have told me. I am not prepared to give you an answer now. Come to my office at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon and bring Miss Ward with you."

"Thank you, Miss Wilder. Good night."

Feeling that there was nothing more to be said, Grace rose and held out her hand to the dean. The older woman took the hand in both of hers and looked deep into Grace's honest eyes.

"You are a true house mother," she said

gently. "I know something of how greatly Miss Ward has tried your patience, and if I do decide to give her an opportunity to begin over again it will be largely because you have asked me."

When Grace let herself into Harlowe House a little later a hasty glance into the dining-room revealed the fact that dinner was over. "I'll come down and get mine after awhile," she decided, and ran upstairs to her own room.

"Well?" inquired Emma as Grace entered.

"Pretty well," retorted Grace. "I won't know positively until to-morrow. Is Miss Ward in her room?"

"She is," stated Emma, "and, judging from the sounds, packing is in full swing. I have heard her trunk lid banging frequently and wickedly, and she is opening and shutting the drawers of her chiffonier in an anything but gentle manner."

"I must see her," declared Grace.

"Then prepare to be greeted with an icy blast," predicted Emma.

The next moment found Grace knocking on Evelyn's door.

There was a rush of steps, the door was flung open and Evelyn faced her, white and defiant.

"Miss Wilder wishes you to be in her office at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon. It will be to your interest to do as she requests," stated Grace briefly. Without giving Evelyn an opportunity for speech she turned and walked down the hall to her room.

"Back so soon and no bones broken," commented Emma.

Grace laughed a little in spite of herself. "Really, Emma, this is a serious matter," she declared. "I'm not at all sure that Miss Wilder will give Miss Ward another chance."

"Don't think about it and she will. Worry over it and you'll defeat your own hope. Think about your dinner instead. It's downstairs keeping hot for you. I'll go down with you and entertain you while you eat. I have a letter from Elfreda which I've been keeping as a surprise. There is something in it that you will be glad to know."

The "something" was Elfreda's announcement that Miriam had invited her to go to Oakdale for the Easter holidays.

"That settles it, Emma, you simply must come home with me!" exclaimed Grace. "You know you delight in J. Elfreda."

"I do, I do," solemnly agreed Emma. "I'll think it over, Gracious, and if my finances can be stretched to cover my railroad fare I'll be

'wid yez.' But who will look after the Harlowites if I fold my tents like the Arabs and set sail for Oakdale?"

"I don't know yet. Louise Sampson, perhaps. She is so capable and the girls not only like her but respect her as well. I must talk with her first. She may not wish to assume the responsibility. Then again she may have other Easter plans. We shall manage, somehow, to arrange things satisfactorily."

Louise Sampson had no definite Easter plans, so she said, when Grace broached the subject to her the following day. With never-failing good-nature she readily agreed to take charge of Harlowe House during the absence of Grace and Emma, provided Grace felt confident that she was able to measure up to her responsibility.

"I'm so thankful that's arranged," sighed Grace as Louise left her office after luncheon to return to her classes. "I wish some other things could be as easily disposed of."

As she dressed that afternoon to go to Miss Wilder's office she was far from joyous. She disliked the idea of meeting Evelyn in the dean's office. She was confident that Miss Wilder would state frankly to Evelyn why she had been spared.

Her conjecture was only too well grounded.

When Evelyn appeared in the dean's office at precisely four o'clock, half anxious, half defiant, Miss Wilder read her a lecture, the cutting severity of which caused Evelyn to flush and pale with humiliation and anger. "Remember, Miss Ward," she emphasized, "it is solely due to Miss Harlowe's intercession in your behalf that I have decided to allow you to remain at Overton."

"Oh, dear, I hope she isn't going to make Evelyn apologize to me," was Grace's thought. "Why did Miss Wilder ask me to come here to-day?"

As if in answer to her unspoken question, Miss Wilder went on to say, "Miss Harlowe came to me last night and asked me not to send you home. I requested her to be present to-day to hear what I wished to say to you. I trust, Miss Ward, that, hereafter, you will see fit to observe the rules of Overton College and live up to them, as a second infringement of this nature will mean instant dismissal from Overton. That is all, I believe."

Thus dismissed Evelyn left the room without a word.

Grace lingered for a moment's conversation with Miss Wilder, then left the office and started across the campus for Harlowe House. Half way there she glanced at her watch. It

was not yet five o'clock. She would have time to do a little shopping before dinner. Turning her steps in the opposite direction she was soon hurrying along Overton's main business thoroughfare.

It was ten minutes to six when, her shopping done, she came within sight of Harlowe House. She wondered if Evelyn were at home. Of late she had been more intimate than ever with Althea Parker. As Grace walked into the house and slowly up the stairs the pale face of Ida Ward rose before her. She was glad that she had been able to avert the disastrous consequences of Evelyn's disobedience so that Evelyn alone should suffer.

Entering her room she took off her wraps and began rearranging her hair preparatory to going downstairs to dinner. The sound of footsteps in the hall, the opening of Evelyn's door, then Evelyn's voice declaring excitedly, "You can do it if you want to," caused Grace to lay down her brush and involuntarily listen for a reply.

It came, and in Mary Reynolds' distressed tones. "Oh, really, I couldn't, Evelyn. Please, please don't ask me."

"You must," Evelyn's command broke forth sharply.

"I won't," Mary refusal gathered strength.

"You have no right to ask me and I have no right to do it."

"Then you are not my friend if you don't do as I ask," flung back Evelyn, "and I shall never speak to you again. Please go away and don't ever come to this room again."

"I am your friend," quivered Mary, "that's why I refuse to do something which will surely make trouble for you."

"How can it make trouble for me?" demanded Evelyn. "You know as well as I——"

But Grace, coming to a sudden realization that she was listening to something not intended for her ears, sprang from her seat before her dressing-table and went downstairs, wondering not a little what it all meant.

CHAPTER XX

A DOUBLE PUZZLE

MARY REYNOLDS slipped into her place at dinner that night with red eyelids and a woe-begone expression on her small face. Evelyn did not enter the dining-room until after the others had began their meal. Despite the air of careless indifference with which she took her seat, Grace fancied she

saw a gleam of anxiety in her eyes. From the few words she had overheard she understood not only the meaning of Mary's dejection, but also of Evelyn's anxious look. But what was it that Evelyn had required of Mary and that Mary had bluntly refused to do? Suppose Evelyn had involved herself in some fresh difficulty. To Grace the thought was distinctly disturbing. Still she felt that it was not within her province to interfere. After all it might be nothing of vital importance, merely a girls' disagreement.

Resolutely dismissing the matter from her mind, Grace thought no more of it. That evening Evelyn came to her as she sat reading in the living room and, in her most distant manner, notified Grace that she intended to go to the dance to be given by the Gamma Kappa Phi, a Willston fraternity, at their fraternity house. Miss Hilton, a member of the Overton faculty, would chaperon her. There were four other freshmen besides herself invited.

Grace made no objection to Evelyn's announcement. After the severe reprimand she had received it was hardly probable that Evelyn would again misrepresent matters. Quite by accident the next day she encountered Miss Hilton upon the campus, and the teacher confirmed Evelyn's story by mentioning the dance

and inquiring if Grace had been asked to do chaperon duty. "I am surprised that you weren't," had been Miss Hilton's comment when Grace answered that her services had not been solicited.

Grace had smiled to herself as she went on her way. She was not in the least surprised at not being invited by Evelyn to play chaperon. She was glad that she had not been asked. She decided that she would not have accepted. The dance was to be held on the Friday evening of the following week, and on the Saturday morning after she would be on her way to Oakdale.

How long and yet how short the days seemed that lay between her and home. Long because of her impatience to see her father and mother, short because of the multifold details to be attended to in Harlowe House.

"I'm so tired," she sighed when, at seven o'clock on Friday evening, she saw her trunk and Emma's safely in the hands of the expressman. "Thank goodness our packing is done and gone and out of the way. Let's do recreation stunts to-night, Emma. Suppose we call upon Kathleen and Patience. Incidentally we can pay our respects to Laura Atkins and Mildred Taylor. If they aren't busy we might have a quiet celebration just for auld lang syne at Vinton's. We can be home by ten o'clock."

"All right," agreed Emma, who knelt on the floor, her glasses pushed above her forehead, wrestling valiantly with a refractory strap of her suit case. A moment and she had buckled it into place with a triumphant cluck. "There, that won't have to be done at the last minute. Shall I telephone the girls that we are coming? It's after seven now."

"Yes, do."

Emma left the room returning shortly.

"They are all at home. The sooner we reach Wayne Hall the sooner the celebration will begin," she reminded.

"Then we'll go at once."

Five minutes later the two young women were on their way across the campus. As they neared Wayne Hall a limousine passed containing Miss Hilton, Althea Parker and a freshman friend of Evelyn's. Althea was driving. She bowed curtly to Grace and Emma as her car whizzed by them.

"They are going for Evelyn, I suppose," commented Emma.

"Yes. Oh, bother!" exclaimed Grace, "I've forgotten a letter to Arline which I must mail to-night. Will you wait until I go back for it?"

With light feet Grace sped across the campus, letting herself into the house with her latch key.

As she stepped into the hall, a buzz of voices caused her eyes to be fixed on the living-room. Through the parted curtains she saw a dazzling figure which was standing in the middle of the living room, surrounded by a group of admiring girls.

It was Evelyn, looking like some wonderful fairy vision in a gown of apricot satin and chiffon, embroidered with exquisite little sprays of tiny rosebuds. The excitement of wholesale admiration had deepened the blue of her eyes to violet and her usual expression of bored indifference had changed to one of intense animation, due to her love of adulation. Grace watched her fascinatedly for a moment, then, remembering that Emma was waiting for her, she hurried on upstairs for her letter and out of the house, unobserved by the group of girls in the living room.

"Was I gone long?" she asked as she rejoined her friend. "I stopped for a minute in the hall to look at Evelyn Ward. She was posing in the middle of the living room for the benefit of an admiring populace. She is going to the Gamma Kappa Phi dance. Miss Hilton and Miss Parker and some of our girls composed the populace. I suppose I ought to have gone in and spoken to them instead of slipping out like a criminal, but I didn't wish to lose

time. Really, Emma, I can't begin to tell you how beautiful Evelyn looked!"

"Her white silk evening gown is a work of art. I wish I had a sister Ida to sew for me," commented Emma.

"Oh, she wasn't wearing her white silk. Her gown was apricot satin and——" Grace came to an abrupt stop. "Why—she—that was a new gown. How could she——"

"Have a new gown when her sister is too ill to make it," supplemented Emma dryly.

Two pairs of eyes exchanged questioning glances.

"She may have brought it with her when she came to Overton," said Grace. "She is very secretive, you know. All along she may have been saving it for some such occasion as this dance."

"True enough," admitted Emma. "Always take people at their face value until you find they haven't any," she added cheerfully.

"I shall," declared Grace. "I'm not going to spoil my Easter vacation by worrying over something that is really Evelyn's own affair."

CHAPTER XXI

THE PUZZLE DEEPENS

GRACE experienced a pleasure in being at home for Easter so deep as to be akin to pain. When as a student at Overton she had traveled happily home for her Christmas and Easter vacations there had been a difference. Then, her classmates had much to do with making it easier to be away from her adored father and mother. But now that she had bravely launched her boat on the tempestuous sea of work, she found that home was a far distant shore, for whose cheery lights she often yearned. To be sure Emma was a never-failing source of consolation, but there were more times than one when the clutching fingers of homesickness were at her throat.

To Mr. and Mrs. Harlowe, Emma Dean was an unfailing source of amusement and delight. In Hippy, too, she found a kindred spirit, and when Elfreda arrived the funny trio was complete. It seemed to Grace that she had not laughed so much in years. Anne, Jessica and Reddy had not been able to join their friends for the Easter holidays and were loudly mourned and sorely missed. Tom Gray man-

aged to come on for a two days' visit and cause Grace the only unhappy moments she spent at home by again asking her to give up her beloved work to marry him.

"I'm so sorry for Tom," she confided to her mother, on the night before leaving home to return to Overton, "but I can't give up my work, even for him. Really and truly, mother, I wish I did love Tom in the way he wants me to love him, but I don't. I feel toward him just as I felt when I first met him. He's a good comrade; nothing more."

"If you loved Tom, your father and I would be glad to welcome him as our son, Grace," was her mother's quiet reply. "He is a remarkably fine type of young man, but unless you reach the point where you are certain that he is, and always will be, the one man in the world for you, you would be doing not only yourself but him too, the greatest possible injury if you promised to marry him."

"That is just it!" exclaimed Grace. "I told him so, but I know that didn't console him. Last June when I came home from Overton I thought perhaps I might say 'yes' later on. But now that I've been working for almost a year I find I'd rather keep on working. It would be dreadful, of course, if some day I should suddenly discover that I did love him

enough to marry him and then he shouldn't ask me. That isn't likely to happen. I don't believe I could give up my work for any man. My whole heart is in it."

In spite of her declaration of unswerving loyalty to her work, more than once, Tom's fine resolute face rose before Grace on the return journey to Overton. During the afternoon Emma, usually loquacious, became absorbed in a book, so that Grace, who could not settle herself to read, had altogether too much opportunity for reflection.

She was inwardly thankful when the lights of Overton twinkled into view. Emma was still deep in her book. "We are almost there, Emma," she reminded.

Emma glanced out of the window, then closed her book and began to gather up her belongings.

"I wonder how things are at Harlowe House," mused Grace, as they crossed the station platform. "Come on, Emma. There's a taxicab just turning into the station driveway."

Three minutes later they were speeding through the silent streets. It was after nine o'clock and there were few persons passing.

"No place like home," caroled Emma as they let themselves into Harlowe House. In the living-room they found Louise Sampson and

half a dozen girls. At sight of Grace and Emma, Louise came quickly forward.

"We thought you would come!" she exclaimed, "so we decided to watch for you. We have hot chocolate and sandwiches. Do say you're hungry."

"We are ravenous," assured Emma, "and as soon as we make a trip upstairs and dispossess ourselves of our goods and chattels we'll come to the party."

"Everything has gone beautifully," Louise confided to Grace, when later she dropped down on the window seat beside her, where the latter had established herself with a sandwich and a cup of chocolate. "Only one thing bothered me, and that was the way Miss Reynolds moped. She and Miss Ward had a quarrel and poor Miss Reynolds still goes about looking like a red-eyed little ghost. No one can find out her trouble and no one seems to be able to comfort her. One day last week I almost thought I saw Miss Ward crying too, but I must have been mistaken. She is too proud to cry over anything. There are several letters for you, Miss Harlowe. I put them in the top drawer of your desk in the office."

At the word "letters" Grace had risen to her feet. "You'll excuse me if I go for them at once, won't you?" she asked.

"Of course," smiled Louise.

A goodly pile of letters met her eyes as she opened the drawer. Grace ran through the envelopes with eager fingers. The square thin envelope with the foreign postmark meant a letter from Eleanor Savelli. There was one from Mabel Ashe and another from Mabel Allison, Arline Thayer and Ruth Denton were also represented in the collection and on the very bottom of the pile lay a square envelope addressed in Anne's neat hand.

Grace pounced upon it joyfully, and, laying the others on the slide of her desk, tore it open and became immediately absorbed in the closely written sheets. When she had finished reading the letter she laid it down, then picking it up again turned to a paragraph on the last sheet.

"I promised to try to help Miss Ward," wrote Anne. "Well, I have practically secured an engagement for her with Mr. Forest. It is an ingenue part in 'The Reckoning,' which is to run in New York City all summer, at his theater. If she can come to New York as soon as college closes Mr. and Miss Southard wish her to stay at their home. We can soon tell whether she can play the part or not. If she can't, Mr. Southard will be able to give her 'bits' in his company, but the other part is by far the best engagement if she can make good

in it. Both Mr. and Miss Southard say, however, that they must have a letter of consent from her sister before they will undertake launching her in the theatrical world. They will write her if Miss Ward wishes them to do so. It is a really great opportunity for her. You know how easily and delightfully I earned my way through college. Let me know as soon as you can, Grace, what she wishes to do."

Grace read this paragraph half a dozen times. Her other letters lay unheeded before her. Finally she gathered them up and, with the open letter in her hand, went slowly upstairs. At Evelyn's door she paused and listened. She heard the sound of some one moving about within. Yes, Evelyn was still up. Grace rapped boldly on the door.

A moment and it swung open. Evelyn stood staring blankly at Grace. She was wrapped in the folds of a pale blue silk kimono. Her hair hung in loose golden waves far below her waist and she reminded Grace of the beautiful Rapunzel of fairy tale fame who was shut up in a tower by a wicked witch and forced each night to let down her golden hair so that her dreadful jailer might climb up and into the tower window.

"Miss Ward," began Grace, without giving Evelyn time to utter a word, "I am sorry to

disturb you so late in the evening, but I have very good news for you. Miss Pierson has all but secured an engagement for you in 'The Reckoning,' a new play which is to run in New York City all summer. Read what she says."

Grace handed the sheet of paper to Evelyn.

The girl stretched forth her hand mechanically for it. She still regarded Grace dully. Then to Grace's utter amazement she burst into tears. "I can't—take—the—engagement," she sobbed. "I'm—not—coming—back—to—Overton—next year."

"What can have happened to her?" wondered Grace. Aloud she said: "Don't decide too hastily, Miss Ward. Take three or four days in which to think things over. I'll come in and see you to-morrow."

Evelyn made some incoherent response, unintelligible to Grace. The latter realized that in her present state Evelyn could not be comforted. It was best to leave her entirely alone until she had had her cry out. To-morrow would be time enough to try again to try to discover what had happened.

CHAPTER XXII

TWO LETTERS

SHORTLY after Grace returned to her room Emma joined her.

"Where did you go? You are not the only one whose correspondents rose nobly to the occasion," she exulted, holding up several letters. "You haven't read yours yet, have you. Let's get ready for bed, put on our dressing gowns, and have a letter reading orgy."

"All right," agreed Grace. "I've already opened one of mine. It was from Anne. She sends her love to you, and what do you think, Emma?" Grace lowered her voice. "She has secured a New York engagement for Evelyn Ward. I saw Miss Ward to-night, but something is troubling her. When I went to the door to tell her what Anne had done she began to cry. I couldn't find out what ailed her, and the more I talked the harder she cried. She said, however, that she couldn't accept Anne's offer. She thinks she won't come back to Overton."

"Happy Overton," commented Emma unsympathetically. "Now hurry into your dressing gown and let's begin our letters."

Evelyn appeared at breakfast the next morning looking weary and haggard. Her face was very pale and her eyes were heavy. By night, however, she seemed to have regained something of her old poise. Covertly watching her, Grace noticed that for some unknown reason she was much subdued. Several days afterward she came to Grace and finally refused Anne's offer. "But are you quite certain that you are acting wisely, Miss Ward?" Grace asked in perplexed amazement. "Last winter you were anxious to go into dramatic work."

"I have changed my mind," was Evelyn's sole reply.

Grace wrote to Anne advising her of Evelyn's refusal, but adding that she wished Anne would keep Evelyn in mind. "I can't help feeling that she is acting against her real desires and that later she will realize her mistake."

The little that was left of April passed quickly. Life went on placidly enough at Harlowe House, although Grace found few idle moments. With the first of June she began a detailed report of her year's work to be presented to the faculty and to Mrs. Gray. This report had not been required of her. She was making it merely for her own satisfaction. With her it was a matter of pride in having

"Did I Startle You, Miss Ward?"

been a faithful steward. She had tried to safeguard not only the interests of the girls under her roof, but Mrs. Gray's interests as well.

"I hope I've been a good house mother," she murmured wistfully, as, seated in her office one bright Friday afternoon, she worked on her report. The ring of the postman caused her to lay down her pen and hurry into the hall. To her surprise she saw Evelyn Ward had forestalled her. She had opened the door for the postman, and now stood rapidly going over the pile of letters in her hand. Grace saw her separate two letters from the pile. At this instant Evelyn glanced up. She uttered a sharp exclamation of surprise when she saw Grace standing beside her. Two letters fell from her hands.

Grace stooped to pick them up. "Did I startle you, Miss Ward? I did not mean to. I did not know you were in the house. I thought the girls had gone to their classes."

"I—I—am late," stammered Evelyn. "I'm going to my botany recitation in a minute. I—expected a letter. Here is the mail." She thrust the letters she had been holding into Grace's hand, and, turning, almost ran up the stairs.

For an instant Grace's eyes followed Eve-

lyn's disappearing figure, then she turned her attention to the letters. She still held the two she had picked up from the floor in her one hand. Glancing at them she saw that they were both addressed to her. No doubt Evelyn had intended to leave them on her desk. Rapidly sorting the other letters she found another for herself in Anne's handwriting. Placing the letters for the various members of the household in the bulletin board Grace retired to her office to read Anne's letter.

"DEAREST GRACE:

"Just a line to tell you that the part in 'The Reckoning' is still open. Mr. Forest cannot find the type of girl he wishes for the part. She must be dazzlingly, but naturally, blonde and very beautiful. I am sure if he were to see Miss Ward he would engage her at once, even though she has had no dramatic experience. Why not let her read this note? Perhaps she may change her mind. She will never have a better opportunity. I am ready and willing to help her. Am writing in a rush. It is almost time for me to go on. With much love. Will write more fully later.

"Yours as ever,

"ANNE."

Grace laid down the letter with a slight

frown. Since Evelyn's first refusal to consider Anne's proposal Grace had held little communication with her. Of late Evelyn had gone about her affairs with a curious air of repression, which reminded Grace of the terrible calm that so often precedes a storm.

"I'll watch for her when she comes in from her classes and give her Anne's letter," said Grace, half aloud. She picked up the next envelope and looked curiously at the unfamiliar writing. The postmark was all but obliterated. Tearing the envelope she drew forth the letter, unfolded it and read:

"Dear Miss Harlowe:

"More than once I have planned to write and thank you for your goodness to Evelyn, but I have been so very busy that the time has slipped by faster than I realized. Fortunately, for Evelyn and me, I have had a great deal of work to do and have been in exceptionally good health, so that it has been easier than I thought to raise the money to pay her college fees. I will enclose the second payment of her fee in a letter which I am writing to her. I have mentioned in my letter to her that I have written to you. I thank you many times for your goodness to my little sister and trust that she has been truly appreciative of your kindness to

her. Trusting that you have been well and that you have met with the greatest success in your year's work. With grateful thanks and best wishes.

"Yours sincerely,

"IDA WARD."

Grace read the letter through three times. When she raised her eyes from it her face wore an expression of mingled horrified suspicion and unbelief. Surely it could not be possible, and yet—before her mental eyes flashed the vision of that wet January afternoon when she had come back to Harlowe House from her Christmas vacation and had been greeted by the sound of Evelyn's sobs as she passed her door. How she had gone to Evelyn's room and there heard the pitiful story of Ida Ward's illness and her failure to send Evelyn's college fees, and of how, through the Semper Fidelis Fund, she had come forward and bridged Evelyn's difficulty.

What did it mean? "She must have——" muttered Grace. In her agitation she spoke aloud. Then she stopped abruptly. She would not condemn Evelyn without a hearing, but Evelyn would have to explain, if explanation were possible. She laid the letter on her desk and turning away from it tore open the last

envelope, which bore the name of a business house in one corner. It contained a bill from Hanford's, the largest department store in Overton. At the bottom was written. "This account is long overdue. Please remit at once." Grace had a charge account at Hanford's on which, occasionally, she allowed certain girls in the house to buy goods, merely as a matter of accommodation to them. Her gaze traveled down the list of items in bewilderment.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "I never bought a gown there that cost seventy-five dollars, or silk stockings or a scarf. There must be some mistake. I know that none of the girls have either. I haven't bought anything since February. Let me see. It's only three o'clock. I think I'll walk down to Hanford's and have the matter adjusted. I must see Evelyn too, as soon as she comes in."

Grace went upstairs for her hat and was soon on her way to the business center of Overton. Her impatience to learn the truth received its first check with the indifferent assurance of the clerk that Mr. Anderson, the man in charge of the department of accounts, was busy upstairs.

"Then I'll wait for him." With a sigh of resignation she sat down on the oak seat just outside the office window to wait.

It was twenty minutes past four when Mr. Anderson appeared.

"I can't let you know about this at once," was the accountant's discouraging response when Grace laid the matter before him. "We'll take it up with the saleswoman, then write you."

"Very well. I shall expect to hear from you within the next three days." Grace turned away, far from satisfied. Yet there was nothing else to do. Long since she had learned that the system employé of a department store is a law unto himself, and as unchangeable in his methods as the most stubborn Mede or Persian ever dreamed of being.

And now for her interview with Evelyn. How could she best approach the girl whom she suspected of having first shamefully betrayed her sister's confidence, then purposely misrepresented matters to her? And what had Evelyn done with the money? These and similar painful questions occupied her thoughts so fully that she did not realize that she had reached Harlowe House until she found herself ascending the front steps.

Without giving herself time to consider delaying the disagreeable interview, Grace hurried up the stairs. To her surprise Evelyn's door stood partially open. She peered into the

room, but it was empty of an occupant. Stepping inside she glanced about her. Evelyn's hat was gone. She had come in from her classes and gone out again.

Grace went slowly downstairs. She was sorry that she had not been able to have her talk with Evelyn before the others came in from their day's recitations. She decided to wait until after dinner. When Evelyn went to her room she would follow her there. The longer she delayed facing Evelyn with her sister's letter the harder the task would become. But at dinner time Evelyn's place was vacant.

At ten o'clock that night she had not come in.

Becoming alarmed Grace telephoned to Althea Parker to know if Evelyn were with her. In reply to her anxious inquiry Althea declared she had not seen Evelyn for two days. Uncertain as to the wisest course to pursue Grace concluded to wait until Emma came in from an evening's visit with Patience Eliot.

It was almost eleven o'clock when Emma returned.

"I'm so glad you've come," greeted Grace as her friend entered their room. "Evelyn Ward hasn't come in yet and I'm worried about her. I saw her this afternoon, but she hasn't been here since then."

"Very likely she is with Miss Parker." Emma spoke in an unconcerned tone.

"No she isn't. I telephoned Miss Parker. She hasn't seen Evelyn for two days."

"She hasn't?" Emma glanced at Grace in surprise. The ring of anxiety in Grace's voice had not been lost upon her. "What's happened, Gracious?" she asked.

For answer Grace handed Ida Ward's letter to Emma. "Read it," she commanded.

Emma read the letter. "Do you think——" she began.

"What do *you* think?" interrupted Grace. "What can one think? Evelyn received her letter from Ida Ward before I received this. She knew that this letter was on the way. This afternoon I found her at the door sorting the mail. She had two letters in one hand, which she had separated from the others. When she saw me she dropped the two. I stooped to pick them up. Both of them were for me. I said, 'Did I startle you, Miss Ward?' and she stammered something about expecting a letter. She shoved the other letters into my hands and ran upstairs. I haven't seen her since."

"Who was the other letter from that she had picked out?"

"Oh, it was a bill from Hanford's. I——" Grace stopped short and stared at Emma. A

horrible suspicion had seized her. She was afraid that she now understood the meaning of the bill she had received. In one of those curious, illumining flashes, which sometimes reveal in an instant what seems hopelessly obscure, she had hit upon the truth.

Briefly she outlined the situation to Emma, who had long been her confidante.

"You'd better let matters rest till to-morrow," advised Emma. "It's too late to try to find her to-night. We would only create comment and arouse suspicion if we telephone to the houses where her friends live. It wouldn't surprise me if she had left Overton for good and all."

"We must find her," declared Grace with decision.

"What will you do with her if you do find her?"

"I don't know. That will depend entirely upon her. You are right, though, about waiting until morning. We must protect her from the consequences of her own foolishness. For she isn't wicked, Emma. She has been carried away by vanity and love of dress. Perhaps if we gave her another chance she would live all this down and be a different girl."

"Perhaps," Emma's tone was skeptical. "For the sake of the community at large let us

hope for this much-to-be-desired metamorphosis."

But the next morning brought news of Evelyn in the shape of a letter addressed to Grace, which came on the first delivery of the mail for the day. With eager fingers Grace opened it. A slip of blue paper fluttered to the floor as she unfolded it. Picking it up she saw it was a money order made payable to Evelyn Ward, then she read:

"Dear Miss Harlowe:

"When you receive this letter I shall be far away from Harlowe House. I have done dreadful things and I cannot face you. All I can do is to go away where no one knows me, and begin over again. I used the money Ida sent me in the fall for my college fees to buy an evening dress. Then I told you that she was ill. I cried purposely to gain your sympathy because I knew about the Semper Fidelis Fund and was sure you would help me. I meant to pay it all back to you, and so I am going to New York to get work and do it, even though it takes me a long, long time.

"But there is something still more dreadful to tell you. I wanted another new evening gown to wear to the Willston dance. I had paid my college fees for the year, so I thought I could

take the money that Ida sent me for my second payment and buy a gown and other things which I wanted. But Ida wrote and said she couldn't send the money just then, so I went to Hanford's department store and bought the things. I had them charged to your account. When the bill came I was terribly frightened. I thought they wouldn't send it for a long time. I just happened to see it in the bulletin board, so I took it out and tore it up.

"Then I went to Mary Reynolds and tried to get her to lend me some of the treasury money until my money came, but she wouldn't do it. That is why she cried so often. When the first of May came I watched the bulletin board and took the bill again. It had Hanford's address in one corner so I knew it. All the time I kept hoping that Ida would send my money before it was too late. Yesterday morning it came, but in her letter she said she had written to you and told you how well she had been and about her work. I knew it would be dreadful for me if you received her letter, but I did not know when it would come, so I stayed away from my classes and watched the mail. I had the letter from Ida and the bill from the store in my hands when you surprised me this afternoon. You picked them up before I had a chance to do so. Then I knew that there

was just one thing to do and that was to go away.

"Please take the money order and pay the bill at the store. I will pay Semper Fidelis as soon as I can. I will write Ida and tell her how badly I have behaved, and when I go to work in New York I will send for my trunk. It is packed and ready to be shipped.

"Forgive me if you can. I am sorry for everything. I wish I had been different. Good-bye and thank you for your great kindness to me. I did not deserve it. Please don't try to find me.

"Penitently,

"Evelyn Ward."

For a time Grace sat at her desk with the letter in her hand. Then she stood up with the air of one who has come to a definite decision. "I'll go to New York City to-day to look for her," she said half aloud. "I believe she will try to get work at one of the theaters. Mr. Southard and Anne will help me find her. She must come back to Overton. I feel sure that she has suffered enough over this trouble to have learned her lesson."

Grace ran upstairs and burst into her room with, "Emma, Evelyn has gone to New York! I'm going to take the next train there. Read this letter. It will tell you everything. I

haven't time. I must make that 9.15 train."

Grace was in the middle of a hasty toilet when a knock sounded on the door.

Emma answered it.

"Here's a telegram for Miss Harlowe." The maid held out a yellow envelope.

Grace tore it open. One glance at the telegram and she began a joyful dance about the room, waving it over her head. "Hurrah for Kathleen West! She found Evelyn! Read it."

She held the telegram before Emma's eyes.

"Evelyn with me. Return Overton Sunday. All well.

"KATHLEEN."

read Emma aloud. Turning to Grace she quoted with whimsical tenderness, "To Kathleen West, girls, drink her down." Then with twinkling eyes she added, "There's only one thing that I can say to express my sentiments, and, with my sincèrest apologies to the august faculty which trustfully engaged me to teach English, I say it with heartfelt fervor, "Can you beat it?"

CHAPTER XXIII

KATHLEEN WEST, CONFIDANTE

WHEN Evelyn Ward left Grace Harlowe with the letters, which she had tried so hard to obtain, in her possession, she had but one thought. That thought was to leave Harlowe House before Grace realized the full meaning of her guilt. For two days Evelyn's suit case had been packed for just such an emergency. She had not been sure that she could stem the tide of retribution that had set in against her, so she was prepared to slip away if she failed to obtain the letters that meant her undoing. Hardly had Grace reseated herself in her office when Evelyn, suit case in hand, her hat on, the coat to her suit thrown over her arm, stole stealthily down the stairs and let herself out of the house without a sound. Once clear of the house she set off across the campus, almost at a run, in the direction of the station. At four o'clock there was a train to New York. She had a little money. She would go there. Once there she would try to get into a theatrical company.

Arrived at the station she glanced fearfully about her. She did not wish to meet any one

she knew. Leaving her suit case in charge of the station master she left the station and walked slowly up the street. She would stroll about until almost train time. She had over an hour's wait. If she encountered any of the students she knew on the street they would attach no importance to seeing her.

It was five minutes to four when she purchased her ticket to New York. To her relief she had seen no one she knew. When the train pulled into the station she was the first person to board it. She took a seat on the side of the car farthest from the platform, so she did not see a slim hurrying girl's figure rush madly down the platform, just as the train was about to start, and swing herself up the car steps on the last second, heedless of the warning expostulation of the porter.

Torn with remorse for the past, fearful of the future, which, to her overwrought imagination, crouched like a huge black monster ready to spring upon her and engulf her in its cruel jaws, Evelyn watched the swiftly passing landscape with unseeing eyes. When a voice from the seat behind her suddenly addressed her with, "Good evening, Miss Ward," she half sprang to her feet in blind terror. Turning, she found herself looking into the keen, dark eyes of Kathleen West, the newspaper girl.

"Oh—good evening," she faltered.

"Going to New York?" was the brisk question.

Evelyn nodded.

"I'm coming into your seat. I hate riding alone in a train. I'm so glad you are going the whole way."

Evelyn made no reply. She wished Kathleen a thousand miles off.

The newspaper girl scrutinized narrowly her companion's lovely set face. Trained in the study of human nature she had learned to know the outward signs of a perturbed spirit. Her straight brows knit in a puzzled frown. Then, noting that Evelyn had colored hotly under the shrewd fixity of her sharp eyes, she glanced carelessly away.

Neither girl spoke for a little. Evelyn was wondering distractedly how she could escape from Kathleen, when they reached New York, without arousing suspicion on the part of the newspaper girl. Kathleen, whose intuition as well as her eyes told her that all was not well with Evelyn, racked her brain for the words which would tear down the wall of stony reticence which this strange girl had built about herself. Try as she might she could think of no effectual way to begin. Deciding to bide her time she tried to

rouse Evelyn's too-apparently flagging spirits by a crisp account of a big newspaper story which she had run to earth during her Easter vacation. At first she met with small success, but as she talked on Evelyn grew interested in spite of herself and began asking half timid, half eager questions about New York. Was it hard to get work there? Could a girl live on six or seven dollars a week in a large city? How did these girls go about it to find positions? In what section of the city did most of the working girls, who had no homes, live?

Kathleen answered her questions imperturbably, telling of her own experience in New York as a beginner of newspaper work. Later Evelyn plied her with countless questions regarding the stage, its advantages and disadvantages. The throb of anxiety in her voice was stronger than her elaborate pretense of indifference. Figuratively, Kathleen pricked up her ears. It was only when they had exhausted the subjects of the working girl and the stage that she launched at Evelyn the seemingly innocent question, "Where are you going to stay in New York, Miss Ward?"

"I—why——" stammered Evelyn.

"Do you expect to be met at the station? It will be almost midnight when we reach New York, you know."

"I know," muttered Evelyn. Averting her face from Kathleen she stared out the window.

"It's now or never," decided Kathleen. Her strong supple fingers closed suddenly over one of the limp white hands that lay so helplessly in Evelyn's lap. "Miss Ward," she said in a low tense voice, "something dreadful has happened to you. I want you to tell me about it. Remember this. No matter what it is, I am your friend. I feel sure that you are going blindly and alone, to the coldest, cruelest city in the world and I should never forgive myself if I allowed you to do it."

Into Evelyn's eyes leaped indescribable terror as Kathleen's hand closed over hers. For an instant she stared wildly at the newspaper girl, then the stony reserve, with which she had bolstered herself, gave away, and tearing her hands free she covered her face with them.

Kathleen waited patiently till the tearless storm which shook Evelyn had subsided a little. "Now tell me all about it," she urged gently.

Evelyn's hands dropped from her face. The tortured look in her blue eyes aroused all Kathleen's sympathy. Haltingly, tremblingly, bit by bit, Evelyn told of the temptation to use her sister's hard-earned money for fine clothes, and

the gulf of deception and dishonesty into which she had plunged by yielding to it.

Kathleen listened without comment. When Evelyn had finished she said, "You must go back to Overton, Miss Ward, and to Grace Harlowe. She will forgive everything and set you right with yourself again."

"Oh, I couldn't," protested Evelyn wildly. "She knows already how dishonest I've been. I can never go back to Overton. I must stay in New York and work and never see Ida or any one again. I have forfeited all claim to friendship or love."

"Nonsense! Just get rid of that idea as fast as ever you can. You are going to my boarding house with me to-night. To-morrow we will go and see Anne Pierson. I know where the Southards live. We will ask her to get you an engagement. Perhaps you can meet Mr. Forest."

"Miss Harlowe told Miss Pierson about me, and she wrote and offered to get me an engagement," faltered Evelyn, "but I knew I couldn't take it, so I refused. There wouldn't be any chance for me now. That was several weeks ago."

"There is sure to be something for you. You are beautiful, you know," went on Kathleen in an appraising, matter-of-fact tone. "You are sure to make good. You must. You're going

to pay Semper Fidelis back as soon as ever you can and you'll have to work hard and save your money."

Forgetting for the instant her remorse and humiliation Evelyn clasped her hands in an eagerness born of the desire to make reparation. "Oh, I will!" Then her face clouded. "Miss Pierson won't care to help me after the dreadful things I've done."

"Who is going to tell her about them? I'm not. I know Grace Harlowe won't. It isn't necessary for you to tell her either. It shall be a secret among we three. I know Grace will say so."

The two girls, so strangely brought together and united in this new bond of fellowship, talked on. It was ten minutes to twelve when they reached New York City. At the station they were met by a tall clean-cut, young man with keen blue eyes. "Got your wire, Kathleen." He stooped and kissed the self-reliant Miss West, who turned very pink. "I'll have to explain," she smiled as she introduced him to Evelyn. "Mr. Vernon is my fiancé, but don't you dare breathe it at Overton. Miss Ward won't be able to see the persons she is to call upon until to-morrow. She's going to my boarding house with me. You can call a taxicab and ride that far with us." The newspaper

girl's clever explanation bridged a yawning gap.

Kathleen and Mr. Vernon kept up a steady conversation during the ride. Evelyn sat silent, trying to realize just what had happened to her. She experienced an immeasurable sense of relief, as though she had been dragged, just in time, from the edge of a frightful precipice. Long after Kathleen had gone to sleep that night she lay staring into the darkness, wide-eyed and wondering at the goodness of this girl whom she hardly knew, and into her heart crept a sudden revelation of what true fellowship meant and was to mean to her forever afterward.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

THE following morning Kathleen took Evelyn to call on Anne Pierson at the Southards. She gazed almost in awe at Everett Southard, while her feeling of admiration for Anne was deep and abiding. Her undeniable beauty was not lost upon Mr. Southard, who later confided to his sister and Anne that Miss Ward was the most beautiful blonde

girl he had ever seen. After an hour's chat in the actor's big, comfortable library Mr. Southard proposed that they call upon Mr. Forest that morning. Miss Pierson had written Miss Harlowe about the part, he declared, to the complete mystification of both Kathleen and Evelyn. He was glad Miss Ward had been able to come. He was sure she would be exactly suited to the part in "The Reckoning." Kathleen managed to shoot a warning glance at Evelyn not to betray herself. Later, by adroitly questioning Anne, she managed to put herself in possession of all the details concerning the letter Anne had written to Grace.

Mr. Forest quite fulfilled Mr. Southard's prediction. He could not refrain from showing his satisfaction with Evelyn. Within half an hour after entering his office she had signed a contract to play the part of "Constance Devon" in the forthcoming production of "The Reckoning."

"First rehearsal July 2d. Here's the part. Study it. Make these hardened barnstormers help you," declared Mr. Forest with a dry chuckle, as he handed her the part.

"But how does he know that I can do it?" she questioned, half fearfully, as they left the office.

"He is going to take a chance," explained

Mr. Southard. "In his own mind he thinks you will do. He knows we will help you. You must work hard and prove to him that he is right."

To Evelyn the rest of that eventful Saturday seemed like a marvelous dream. She had never before been in a large city, but despite her interest in the sights and sounds of New York she could not help thinking of how different it might all have been if she had not met Kathleen. The busy, endless streets terrified her and the more she saw of the great metropolis the less confidence she felt in her own power to wrest a living from it, single-handed and alone.

After leaving Mr. Forest's office they took luncheon at the Southards. Mr. Southard and Anne had a matinee in the afternoon. That evening they were to give the final performance of their season, which had run later than usual. Kathleen had an assignment for her paper for the afternoon, so Miss Southard took Evelyn to a matinee at one of the theaters. That evening the little party met at six o'clock in Mr. Southard's dressing room, where their dinner was brought in and served to them. Afterward Kathleen, Miss Southard and Evelyn sat in a box and saw Everett Southard and Anne in "The Merchant of Venice."

After the theater came a little supper at the Southards' home to which Mr. Vernon, Kath-

leen's fiancé, was also invited. Miss Southard had insisted that Kathleen and Evelyn should be her guests for the remainder of their stay in New York, and it was under the Southards' hospitable roof that Evelyn fell asleep that night after one of the happiest, most eventful days she had ever spent.

Sunday morning soon slipped by. It seemed hardly half an hour from breakfast until train time. The charming informality with which the actor and his sister treated her made Evelyn feel as though she had known them for a very long time. In the enjoyment of the moment she quite forgot the real reason of her journey to New York, and it was only when Miss Southard invited her to come to their home to live as soon as college was over, in order that Mr. Southard might help her with her new part, that the humiliating remembrance of her misdeeds returned to her with sickening force.

"You must write to your sister, my dear, and explain everything," said Miss Southard. "If you will give me her address I will write to her too. That is one point on which Everett is most particular. He would not encourage a young girl to enter upon the life of the stage without the full consent of her parents or guardian."

When finally she and Kathleen had said good-bye to the Southards, who had seen them

to their train, and were settled for the long ride to Overton, Evelyn faltered, "Kathleen, all the time I was with the Southards I felt just like a traitor. Do you think I ought to have told them everything? It's not fair to them to masquerade under false colors."

Kathleen eyed her companion searchingly. Evelyn's conscience was no longer sleeping. It was now wide awake and tormenting her.

"I'm glad you feel as you do about it, Evelyn," was her blunt rejoinder. "It shows that you are on the right road. I don't believe it is necessary for you to tell the Southards anything. Still there is another person who must decide that."

"You mean Miss Harlowe?"

Kathleen nodded.

"I can't bear to face her." Evelyn's voice sank almost to a whisper.

"You are not the only one who has said that." There was a curiously significant ring in Kathleen's voice that made Evelyn look at her in mute inquiry.

"Let me tell you of another girl who had to face the same situation." Kathleen began with her entrance into Overton as a freshman and told Evelyn the story of her hatred of Grace and her betrayal of Grace's trust, of how Elfreda had shown her the way to reparation and

the gaining of true college spirit, and of how she had tried in a small measure to redeem the past by writing "Loyalheart" as a belated tribute to Grace.

Evelyn listened with somber attentiveness. The past three days had taught her more of life than had her entire eighteen years. She had lately begun to see what college might mean to the girl who lived up to its traditions. Until the moment of hearing Kathleen's story she had felt that Grace Harlowe must despise her utterly. Now she fixed solemn blue eyes on Kathleen. "Do you believe Miss Harlowe will ever forgive me?" was her mournful question.

"Of course she will. You don't know her as I do."

Kathleen's emphatic assurance had a visibly cheering effect upon the other girl. When they reached Overton, however, her dread of meeting Grace returned with renewed force. "I can't face her to-night," she pleaded.

"We are going to Harlowe House now. Come on." Kathleen grasped Evelyn's arm and piloted her up the street at a brisk pace. Neither girl ever forgot that walk across the campus.

"Here we are." They had mounted the steps of Harlowe House. Kathleen rang the bell.

A moment's wait and the door opened. Grace

stood peering out at the two girls. "I knew you'd come. I've been watching for you," she cried. She held out her hands to Evelyn, who dropped her suit case and grasped them with a half smothered sob.

"Come up to my room." Slipping her arm about Evelyn, Grace drew her toward the stairs.

"Good night, Grace, I'll see you to-morrow." The vestibule door closed with a decided click. Kathleen did not wish to be a third party. Grace and Evelyn were better off without her.

Once in Grace's room Evelyn broke down. "Oh, Miss Harlowe, can you, will you forgive me?" she sobbed.

"You mustn't cry so, Miss Ward," soothed Grace. "Of course I forgive you. If Miss West had not brought you home to me I intended to go to New York City to look for you. Remember, you are, and I hope will be until your college days are over, a Harlowe House girl."

"You are too good to me," sobbed Evelyn.

Grace led her gently to a chair. "Sit down," she urged.

Evelyn sank into the chair. "I can't come back to Overton next year." Her head drooped in shame and humiliation.

"You must," said Grace simply, "for your

own sake as well as your sister's. She must never be worried with the slightest inkling of what has happened. It is to be a secret. Outside of Miss Dean and Miss West no one except ourselves knows.

"Miss Pierson and Mr. Southard took me to see Mr. Forest. He engaged me to play a part in his new play 'The Reckoning,'" began Evelyn. "I—I didn't—tell—the Southards—about—things. Kathleen wouldn't let me, but she says I must tell them if you say so. I'd—rather. I—I want to be—honest—now—and—and always." Evelyn's voice shook with the intensity of her feelings.

"Kathleen was right in not allowing you to tell them. You have suffered enough, Evelyn. You must look to the future. Your work this summer will make it possible for you to pay the money you owe Semper Fidelis and your college expenses too."

Grace's sensible, practical words, went far toward restoring Evelyn to her normal self. The two young women talked long and earnestly. It was after eleven o'clock when Evelyn rose to go to her room.

"I'll prove to you that I am worthy of your trust," she said with shining eyes. "I'll make you and Ida proud of me yet."

After she had gone to her room Grace sat for

a little, her hands idly folded, her thoughts on the girl who had found herself after many false starts. How glad she was that everything had turned out so beautifully, thanks to Kathleen's chance meeting with Evelyn. What a power for good Kathleen had become. Yes, college was really the place where one eventually found oneself. And now her first year of work was almost over. Another week and she would be back in dear old Oakdale. With the thought of home Tom Gray's earnest, boyish face rose before her. It cast a faint shadow on the pleasure of the coming reunion with her family and friends. She hated to feel that she was making Tom unhappy, yet she was equally certain that, with her, work still came first.

"I can't give up my work," she said aloud.

"Well, who said you should?" demanded Emma Dean's matter-of-fact tones. The door stood partly open and Emma had entered just in time to hear Grace's emphatic utterance.

"Has the prodigal returned?"

"She has," smiled Grace. Grace recounted what had taken place that evening. "Isn't it wonderful how college helps these girls to find themselves, Emma?" she asked when she had finished her recital.

"College and Grace Harlowe," declared Emma.

"You mustn't say that," Grace colored and shook her head in emphatic denial.

"Oh, yes, I must, because it is the truth," insisted Emma. "Dear Loyalheart, your Highway of Life led you back into the Land of College, didn't it?"

Grace nodded. "I'm going to stay in the Land of College too, Emma. I was just thinking about it when you came in. That was what made me say, 'I can't give up my work.'"

"Overton needs you, and Harlowe House needs you, and Emma Dean needs you, but are you sure that some one else does not need you more than we do?" questioned Emma slyly.

"That's three to one, Emma, and the majority rules," evaded Grace. "Will you be my roommate, mentor and comforter next year?"

"Most Gracious Grace, I will, and there's my hand on it."

How fully Emma Dean kept her promise and what Grace's second year on the campus brought her will be told in "Grace Harlowe's Problem," the record of her further college life at Harlowe House.

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